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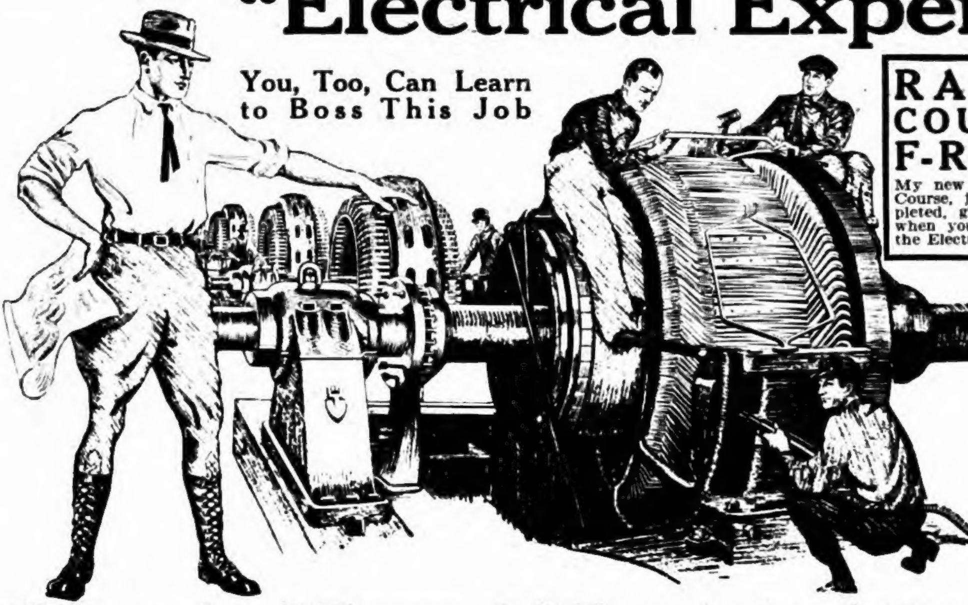

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Adventure

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One Novel, Two Novelettes, Complete

FOR diplomatic reasons it was necessary that all be quiet along India's northwest frontier. So, when *Kangra Khan* abducted a rich American, holding her for ransom, the pursuing force consisted only of *King, Ramsden, Jimgrim*—he carried the "Tooth"—and *Narayan Singh*. In the bleak, mysterious Hills they played tag with the savage hordes of Hillsmen—and Death. "MOHAMMED'S TOOTH," a complete novel by Talbot Mundy in the next issue.

IN THE Argonne offensive *Artie Beal* was right up front and did a big day's work. But he wasn't satisfied even when the colonel intimated that he would be recommended for a cross. "FIVE HUNDRED FRANCS," a novelette of an American soldier in the World War, by Leonard H. Nason, complete in the next issue.

"*WILD" BALDWIN* enlisted in the United States Navy to get away from booze, but he couldn't stay off. "There's a hump to get over," he explained. "I know this: If I ever get over one whole year I'll never take another drop of the —— poison." And when his captain heard that, *Baldwin* won a friend he didn't want. "OVER THE HUMP," a Navy novelette by Charles Victor Fischer, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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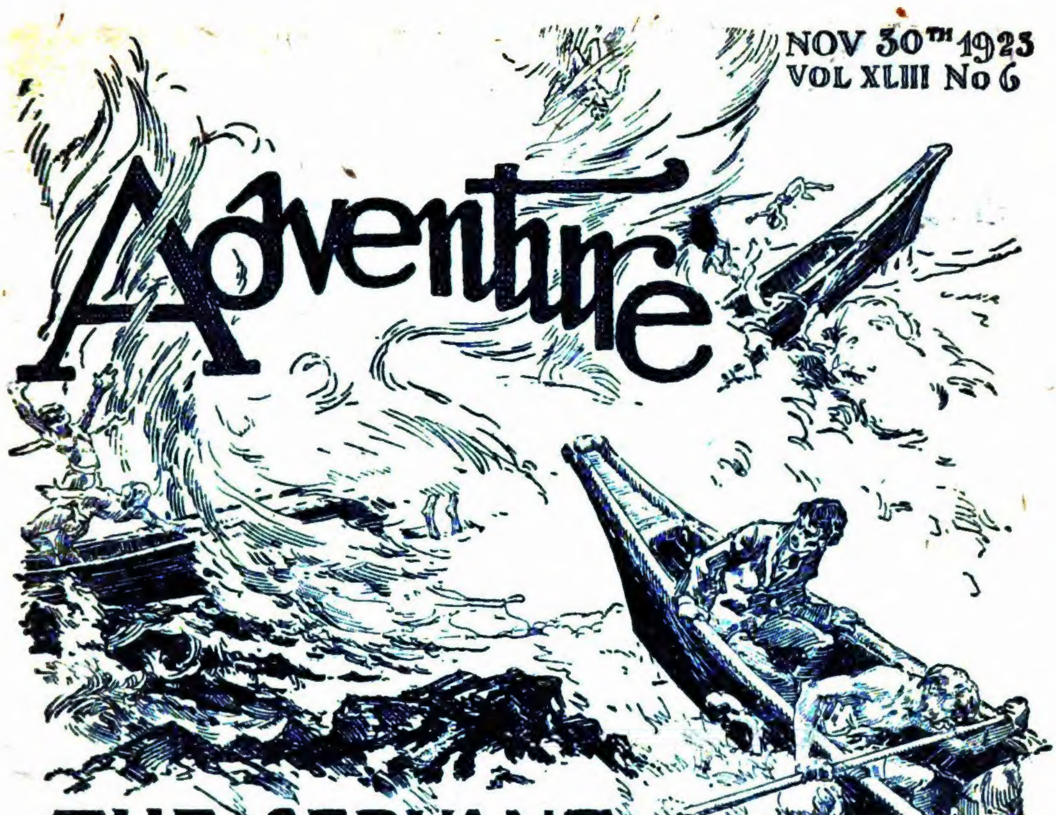

NOV 30TH 1923
VOL XLIII No 6

Adventure

THE SERVANT OF PETER ILLINGTON

A Complete Novelette by T. S. Stribling

Author of "Fombombo," "The Web of the Sun," etc.

HOW grotesque, incompatible and horizons apart may be the worlds occupied by two men, who, nevertheless, live cheek by jowl in this weft of things we call time and space is curiously illustrated by—

Peter Charles Kent Illington, under-secretary in the colonial service and—

Tanoa, his native servant.

These two men, each about the same age, had lived together now for five months as master and servant.

Peter Illington divided his time rather tediously among dances and duty, tennis and teas; and he thought that in the beginning God had fashioned this world for the pleasure of men, especially Englishmen, and He might have made a number of improvements if He had taken second thought. Illington believed that the sun never set on English soil because it had been made and hung up especially to illuminate the Empire.

Tanoa's belief was not quite so unscientific and anthropocentric as this. He thought a great serpent, Ndengei, had laid some eggs in the sand and then had crawled away. Out of those eggs hatched earth, sky, sea, sun, moon, stars, men, animals and all things. But Ndengei, that great serpent, had crawled away and did not even know that the eggs had hatched, or what they had hatched; that Ndengei cared nothing at all about any of it. That Ndengei was far far away somewhere, asleep, plunged into a profound reptilian

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torpor which no cry could break and no prayer penetrate.

Had these two theories been tested pragmatically, that is to say, to see if they worked in the lives of the two devotees, the result would have been a stand-off. The theory of each devotee fitted his life perfectly. Which is about as much to be wondered at as the corelative fact that the skin of each man fitted him perfectly; notwithstanding differences in size, shape and color.

How then, can one hope to get at the Truth?

ON THIS particular morning the telephone tinkled while Peter Illington was at breakfast. The under-secretary knew of his man's silly aversion to the telephone, and usually he answered it himself, but this morning he was at breakfast, had danced late. And it was too early to answer a telephone call anyway. Who the —— could be calling a man at this hour? Gad, if it was a bill, he would never pay it. But he said quietly enough—

"Tanoa, the telephone rang."

The cinnamon-colored man just behind his chair in the mulberry shirt and straw sandals, from the very moment the bell tinkled had been apprehensive of precisely this sentence. But there was nothing for it now. He turned and shuffled slowly from the breakfast-room into the library. Books, yellow and tan books, stood in a case by the wall; and there on the desk was the queer black metallic gullet with an ear hung to it, and the thing listened through its mouth and talked out of its ear in a strange, inhuman, buzzing fashion. A dinkus that sat on his master's desk, divined thoughts of men afar off and whispered them to any one who cared to listen. What is more it advertised that dangerous facility by ringing a bell. Ndengei! But that was a devilish thing to have about!

Tanoa tried to purify his own hectic thoughts of the coming *vilavilarevo* which had occupied him all that morning, and all the morning before, and the one before that, lest this sinister contrivance on the desk repeat his forbidden musings; Ndengei knew where, and to whom.

The native took down the thing's ear and applied it to his own ear, which was necromancy, and the ear said, mocking the voice of an old Englishman in a buzzing sort of way, that Mr. Illington would report at the state house immediately.

Tanoa, who had been sweating slightly through this danger, now hurried out in his ridiculous pidgin English—

"Yass, yass, me go tell," hung the speaking ear beside the listening mouth—of all irrational devils—and got hurriedly back into the breakfast-room.

At the breakfast table the under-secretary pursued a dissatisfied reverie concerning his relations with the world. He was not getting on, he felt, as his merit deserved. To have a post in the Fijis—and a servant like Tanoa. Illington quirked down his full, rather fresh, red lips. Then, his thoughts being returned to his servant, he reflected that he ought to have answered that telephone himself, as his man for some unknown reason had proved over and over again most untrustworthy when it came to tel— His meditation was interrupted by Tanoa's return. The master glanced about.

"Well, what?"

"Judge Shenstone say come state house quick."

Peter Illington looked at his servant in despair.

"—— it! Wrong again! I don't have a desk in Judge Shenstone's department. He would never call me Tanoa, why don't you listen, *listen* when you——"

The native made a placating gesture and turned lithely to the study again.

"I go say you no come."

"—— no! Don't do that!"

He wet the tips of his fingers hurriedly in a glass of water and wiped at them perfunctorily with his napkin.

"—— it, I ought to have answered it myself in the first place. I always have to finally."

He got himself up out of the chair and went to the telephone.

To Peter's surprize investigation confirmed his servant's report. After the wait of making connections a rather testy voice in the receiver said it thought Peter had started a half-hour ago.

Peter was amazed.

"What's the alarm?" he asked. "Stirring out a fellow at this hour——"

The voice replied with that drawling frigidity which marks an Englishman at the extreme limit of his patience. It said it was unaware that members of the colonial service were paid by the hour, or that the service was a labor union with a minimum hour rule.

"If this be your status," continued the voice, dropping icicles, "you can put in your claim for double-time, Mr. Illington."

The under-secretary's pink cheeks warmed up. He arose vibrating with wrath at Tanoa because that cinnamon-colored unfortunate had broken his gait and had transmitted a message correctly.

"Boy!" he called sharply from study to dining-room. "Go bring around the dog-cart quick! You blundering ——"

He made into his dressing-room, whipped off breakfast jacket and slippers, and hurried into his street clothes.

"Such a post! Such a servant!"

He glanced into a mirror at his own figure bending over a boot, and the figure stared back at the under-secretary with an anxious, questioning face. The man and his reflection were asking what could have brought Judge Shenstone to the state house at such an hour, and what could have routed the under-secretary himself up from the breakfast table with such a reprimand!

Was there an uprising among the natives? Had war flamed out in Europe again? Had one of those damnable scandals which at long intervals crop up in the English colonial service set everybody by the ears again?

He hurried to the door, stamping his feet to settle them in his tight boots. As he flung open the shutter, the long double row of royal palms down the boulevard, bending and clacking in the sea breeze, reenforced the turmoil of his thoughts. Just then Tanoa drove out in the dog-cart. The nutmeg-colored man leaped out and ran around to the head of the pony.

The under-secretary waggled an impatient and negative finger at him.

"Stay in! Stay in; I want you to drive this pony back. Don't know how long I'll be kept!"

The brown man with the bleached wool started to get in again, but hesitated and looked at his master.

"Uh—Mistuh Petuh ——"

"Get in, I say!"

There was a warning tenseness in the diplomat's voice.

"But me no bring pony back," burst out Tanoa desperately. "Tanoa no come back."

Illington came out of his own perturbation a trifle to stare at his servant.

"*You* are not coming back? Not coming back to the bungalow?"

"No, suh; Tanoa no come back to bungalow."

"Do you mean you are quitting my service!"

"Yaas, suh; quittin' su'vice."

The under-secretary was amazed and piqued.

"Why you cotton-topped dolt, don't you know you won't get as soft a berth again!"

"Yaas, suh; know dat."

Tanoa agreed unctuously, hoping this faint compliment would avert his master's rising wrath.

"Then what the —— you leaving me for? Just as we begin to understand each other? Just as we get to pulling together harmoniously?"

The brown man made a gesture to show how he regretted breaking these harmonious relations which were stormed at him so violently.

"Get in! Get in!" cried Peter. "I have no time to waste now. Drive down to the square with me. If you won't bring the pony back, it will have to stand there. Jump in!"

The rather grotesque servant jumped in, and the two went clattering down the boulevard as fast as the little English pony could take them. Peter Illington was so outdone at this approaching loss of his servant that he drove in silence under the clacking palms along a great curving fairway which gave on a view of Suva Bay, with pretty English cottages in the foreground, with native huts with roofs of velvety thatch and coco-palms in the middle ground, while behind it all burned and shimmered the turquoise blue of the bay. This scene usually elicited admiration a-plenty, but he scarcely saw it this morning and finally turned and said in a disgusted tone —

"Well, where are you going anyway?"

"Me sent for."

Peter looked him up and down.

"Who would send for you?"

"A king," said Tanoa humbly.

"A king!"

"A king sent his *buli* (tribute gatherer) for Tanoa."

The under-secretary was surprized into a snort of supercilious amusement at the idea of a king sending for poor Tanoa.

"What does he want with you?"

"Tanoa king's *qali.*"

"*Qali,*" repeated the under-secretary with disgust.

He knew all about it now. *Qali* was a sort of native feudal relationship which, even under the English régime, managed to persist between the different tribes. It was rather an annoyance to the economics of the English administration. A chief had a right to exact any number of men from a tribe he held in *qali* apparently for any purpose whatever. Peter asked with a certain curiosity,—

"What would this king do if you did not go?"

"Me go; me *qali.*"

"Yes, but I said *if* you did not ——"

Here the under-secretary decided that Tanoa's peaked head was not shaped to answer hypothetical questions, so he abandoned his and substituted—

"What is he going to do with you when you get there?"

The nut-colored one made a little negative gesture.

"Tanoa no king; Tanoa *qali.*"

It seemed to Peter that his ex-servant was rather overly opaque on the point. He recalled his own hurried summons to the state house and his idea of a native uprising. Tanoa's stress on his ignorance suggested complicity. By this time the little pony had fetched its master in sight of Trafalgar Square. A little later, the dog-cart drew up by a post under the shade of a mahogany. The men got out, and the pony was left standing until some one saw fit to drive it back to the bungalow again.

THE Government buildings, set back among palms and mahogany trees, were old and rather dilapidated red-brick piles; nevertheless through them, as through a useful old glove, the hand of England ruled the archipelago.

The entrance to the supreme court building was a mere passageway leading back into a gloomy interior. Leaning against this entrance stood an ordinary old blackboard stuck full of legal notices. In front of the board stood a short, heavy man in dirty white duck. He had his frowzy head thrust forward and was reading one of the notices with concentrated attention.

As the under-secretary hurried along the graveled path toward this dirty reader of legal notices, he called out some distance away:

"Say, Grimes, what in the —— is up? Judge Shenstone ——"

The short man turned, and a look of relief came in his face.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Illington. The judge is ——"

"What's it about? What's it about, man?"

"It's this notice, Mr. Illington."

Grimes touched one of the papers on the blackboard with a dirty, spatulate forefinger.

"Old King Taumbau is selling Reed Island by public auction tomorrow."

Peter read the notice.

> PUBLIC SALE
>
> On August 4th by public outcry at the western door of the court-house, in Suva, will be sold to the highest bidder, the one-half, undivided interest of King Taumbau in Reed Island, a property lying on meridian—

Then followed a legal descripion of the island with the conclusion "Terms cash."

"Well, what does the judge want to see me about that for?" asked Peter, surprized.

"Why, it's cut us up, sir; shot us to pieces—our back's on the mat."

While Grimes mixed his metaphor he moved ahead of the under-secretary through the narrow passage, which was spotted from end to end with expectoration. The short man stopped at a door, opened it and stood aside to allow Peter to enter first.

Judge Shenstone's office was in a state of disorder. At a desk sat the judge's private secretary talking rapidly over a telephone. On the secretary's left hand lay twelve or fifteen cablegrams in their yellow envelops. The secretary himself was writing and repeating aloud what he was getting over the wire:

> "From Office of Colonial Secretary, London.
>
> "Impossible to enunciate rule forbidding aliens to acquire land in neighboring islands without publishing a thirty-day notice of same. Only relief special act of Parliament. Would suggest ——"

Judge Shenstone himself sat at a great baize-covered table in the center of the room. The table was littered with browned sheep-bound volumes; on the side of the table the judge had cleared a semicircular space in which he worked. He was a thin, white-haired man with a fine old face and wore a thin, black alpaca suit. When he looked at Illington his face seemed a little drawn as if he had been up all night.

"Well, are you here at last, young man?" he asked in an irritated voice.

"I have a servant," began Peter defensively, "a —— half-wit who always gets my messages——"

"Yes, that's all right—do you know where Reed Island is?"

"In the northeastern wing of the archipelago."

"What does it raise?"

"Coconuts."

"What do you fancy the yield would be worth a year?"

"Oh, say a couple of hundred pounds."

"What deductions would you draw if some one should offer one hundred thousand pounds for a half-interest in Reed Island?"

"I should say he was a very bad business man, your honor."

The judge paused and waggled a finger at Peter.

"Young man, he would be unless he were purchasing the basic governmental rights which underlie our private rights as individuals. Then that would be quite another question. Value would be placed on quite a different plane. Illington, do you realize what it would mean if some foreign power should acquire Reed Island and convert it into a coaling-station, a naval base, or even a fort?"

The under-secretary's face became grave indeed.

"Why, that wouldn't do at all, your honor. It would be a continual threat at English supremacy in the archipelago. It would even compromise Australia and New Zealand——"

Judge Shenstone cut him short with a gesture and began a swift explanation. "One of those little native kings, Taumbau, has put up Reed Island for a judicial sale tomorrow at noon. Taumbau already owns half of it. The other half belongs to a man named Sylvester, an American who lives somewhere in the States. Taumbau has a perfect right to sell it for division. Very good.

"Day before yesterday the British bank here received a certified check for one hundred thousand pounds which was a cash guarantee to allow a certain James Pyx to bid on Reed Island in the auction tomorrow. This seemed an exorbitant amount to me. I was pondering the matter when Constable Grimes there came into my office. I mentioned it to him, and Grimes knew Pyx. Pyx is a beach-comber who lives here in Suva somewhere in the native quarters down on the bay. For Pyx to handle a fortune was not only amazing, it was suspicious.

"We decided we would better look into the transaction. We have been tracing that hundred thousand pounds by cable all night long. It has been kited from bank to bank in an evident effort to conceal its source. It came through Honolulu, Sydney, Hong Kong; and it originated in Tokyo, where it had been deposited to the credit of one Shimo Nessu. Then we knew that Pyx was a figure-head and Shimo Nessu was bidding on Reed Island."

Illington followed this development with concern.

"Who is Shimo Nessu?" he asked intently.

"Henry," called the judge, "'Who's Who in Japan.'"

The private secretary got up, brought a big red book and laid it before Peter open at a page. The under-secretary read:

> Shimo Nessu—1888, financier, statesman, shipbuilder. Engineering in Imperial University of Tokyo 1910; ship-designing Oxford 1912. Entered Hikawame shipyards as assistant designer 1913. At outbreak of World War rose to Superintendent. Vice-President 1916; President 1919; Minister of Japanese Navy 1921. Noted for his aggressive policies. Married daughter of Admiral Neogi. Address, House of Eleven Terraces, Kobe, Japan.

The first emotion that registered with Peter Illington was that thrill of jealousy which every ambitious young man feels when he hears of some man close to his own age gaining far ahead of him in the competition of life.

The under-secretary stared at the thumbnail conspectus a moment and thought:

"——! And here I am still here!"

Then he got his mind around to something more practical.

"Is there any way to stop him, judge?"

"We have no time to enunciate a thirty-days' notice of an alien exclusion act. Our only legal remedy will be a bill in Parliament—a bill in Parliament by tomorrow!"

"Why, that's hopeless," declared Illington.

"I have cabled in the situation. That is our only legal remedy; but there is a possible personal remedy, Mr. Illington, and that is why I telephoned for you to come here at once."

"I?"

"I want you to go to King Taumbau and explain to him the peculiar peril in which he will place the whole British Government in the Fijis if he sells Reed Island to a minister of the Japanese Navy. After all, this King Taumbau is an English subject. Appeal to his patriotism, his love of country, his pride, his loyalty. Make him your friend.

"One fault with us English, Illington, is our lack of humanity. We never are quite human with any one except other Englishmen. So be friendly. Try to forget the fact that Taumbau never heard of Oxford, never saw a Covent Garden 'first night' and never tasted roast beef."

Constable Grimes broke in on the period by adding—

"And you don't want to take too keen notice of his little ways either, Mr. Illington."

The under-secretary looked around at the man in dirty duck.

"His little ways—what do you mean?"

"I mean very likely he will do things, sir, no under-secretary in the colonial service would approve of at all, sir."

"Certainly," interposed the judge, "Illington will remember that his mission is diplomatic, not legal. In fact I chose him because of his talents in diplomacy."

"How do I get to King Taumbau's village?" asked the under-secretary.

"Grimes will get you there. He has been a constable in the islands for twenty years. And if I may, let me impress again, Grimes' suggestion. Remember you are an emissary of good will from the British Government, and no matter what you see—no matter *what* you see, Illington, take no offense at it, pass it as a matter of course. Make your visit to King Taumbau a love feast until—well, until the English Parliament has had time to pass an alien exclusion act, you understand."

Illington drew a face.

"Till the English Parliament has time to pass a bill. Really, Judge Shenstone, you are banishing me for life."

"You will persist as long as your life lasts," returned the judge gravely. "You are in the service of your country, young man."

The judge's touch of the patriotic grandiose was faintly distasteful to Illington. He had been through the Verdun and Somme campaigns and had come to cast what he felt for the Empire in forms of bruskness or profanity, and now to hear this old judge speak of "service of your country—while life lasts——"

"Ah, ——! ——," thought the under-secretary. "To be stuck down in such a post!"

HALF an hour later Constable Grimes and Peter Illington were down on the bay in the native quarters. The huts were bamboo affairs with thatched roofs. The streets were narrow runways swarming with natives and foreign sailors. Queer one-wheeled native carts pushed through this press while underfoot played, begged and wailed naked brown children.

Grimes picked his way with certainty through this human rat warren and stopped before a malodorous, double-storied bamboo house with a queer bamboo stairway leading up to the second story around the outside of the building. It looked like a fire-escape. In this elevated monkey's nest lived Mr. Pyx, the financier who was going to bid a hundred thousand pounds on Reed Island. Grimes and Illington climbed the bamboo steps to interview the magnate. When they knocked on the door there came no answer. Finally Grimes applied his shoulder and pushed open the shutter. Nobody was in. An old army blanket lay spread on the floor. A tin plate sat on a greasy window-sill containing the leavings of fish and rice. A very dirty shirt was tossed in a corner. These were all the furnishings the financier possessed.

The under-secretary stood looking about and wondering whether or not he should wait for Mr. Pyx when he heard a step on the bamboo stairs. Almost instinctively the two men stepped a little back from the door and stood alert, almost as if they meant to spring on whoever entered and seize him.

The next moment a man's form darkened the door, then another and another until eight men had filed into the room. They were natives, each with his hair bleached white and felted into a mat. They entered the room, looking about very simply. As the under-secretary stood watching them file in he was astonished to recognize the man next to the last.

"Why, Tanoa!" he cried. "What are you doing here, boy?"

The ex-servant looked at his master without any enthusiasm.

"Me go King Taumbau," he said.

"The —— you do!" exclaimed Illington, somehow pleased at the encounter. "Why are you going?"

The brown man shrugged and nodded at the native at the head of the column.

"Him *buli;* him take me; him know."

The under-secretary had a white man's feeling of ownership and special privilege over the whole brown group because he knew one of them. He turned to the *buli* and questioned him. The *buli* merely shook his head at Peter's English. Constable Grimes picked up the conversation in the native language, and the two talked for two or three minutes.

"He says," explained Grimes, "that King Taumbau told him to come by here and get Mr. Pyx."

"Tell him we go in Pyx's place," directed Peter at once.

When this was translated Peter could see that the *buli* made an objection.

"He says there is going to be a celebration up at King Taumbau's village, and you are too fine a white man to see it," interpreted the constable.

"Aw, piffle on that!" cried Peter in his heartiest and most democratic manner. "tell him I make one of the boys."

"They are really afraid you'll stop it, you know, Mr. Illington. And when it comes right down to it, I rather fancy you will myself, sir. If you've never been out in the bush, sir, you don't know what a celebration means out there. It's enough to take the enamel right off your back teeth, sir."

"Tut, tut; my boy Tanoa is going; been serving me breakfasts for five months and is as mild as a mango. Tell the *buli* I've been in battles where they shot guns which would hold all this crowd in its muzzle; that he mustn't mistake a white collar for a white feather."

The under-secretary smiled, overcame a certain inner repugnance, went over and clapped the *buli* on the shoulder. He was one of the boys.

But the brown men did not warm up to this ebullition at all. On the contrary a visible melancholy hung over the group. However, they agreed to what Grimes told them, mainly, no doubt, because there was nothing else to do. If the white man meant to go, he would go; experience had taught them that. They nodded resignedly, without a smile, turned and moved slowly out of the room, down the bamboo steps; and the white men followed them.

THE eight men had a canoe at the wharf just back of the houses. They picked their way down to it through bags of vanilla beans, piles of pearl shells ready for shipment to some occidental notion factory, and sacked maize.

Illington took the seat of honor in the stern of the long, slender vessel. The eight natives spread themselves along the thwarts. Grimes pushed off and stepped into the bow. The eight paddlers backed away from the dock and presently came forward with a gentle rippling of the muscles in their dark shoulders. Every paddler made precisely the same swing in the brilliant morning sunlight. They might have been machines, they worked so evenly.

It was a queer thing to Illington to see his house servant shift suddenly to the rôle of expert paddler. It was as if one had been petting a tabby cat for some time and then suddenly discovered he had his hands on a civet. It was a surprizing, and somehow a discomforting, feeling.

"At any rate," thought Peter, "he can't keep it up with the others; out of practise for months."

Nevertheless the canoe went on hour after hour.

The natives worked in a melancholy silence, and the canoe coasted down a sea of intense blue studded with chromatic isles and islets. Some of them were mere monoliths of solid stone, lifting red and yellow masses out of the blue of the sea. Long ground-swells swung the canoe up and down as it passed these bright-colored rocks, and its passage disturbed the sea birds nesting on them.

This steady paddling was kept up all the morning and past the meridian. In the afternoon they reached an atoll. The canoe entered the southern opening; and as it moved across the still water, Peter could see far below the flash and movement of tropical fish, the faint outline of a translucent jelly-fish, and once he caught the long, grayish shadow of a shark. A few minutes later the canoe glided out of the northern entrance and once more took the swing and dip of the open sea.

The craft must have logged a steady ten miles an hour; and in the late afternoon the under-secretary was just inquiring how much farther they had to go when he felt, rather than heard, a kind of shaking in his ear-drums. The air seemed to quiver slightly.

When he became sure it was a sensation and not something he fancied, he asked—

"What's that, Tanoa?"

"King Taumbau's drum call Tanoa, Mistuh Petuh."

"How far off is it?"

" 'Bout eight miles."

Illington was impressed. A drum carrying eight miles.

"It is where that smoke is," added Tanoa: "that is King Taumbau's town."

He pointed to a faint line of purplish smoke that was stringing up against the yellow evening sky.

"Is the drum and smoke part of the celebration, Tanoa?"

"Yaas, Mistuh Petuh."

The melancholy of the reply amused the under-secretary.

"Gad, man, I don't see what you are so blue about," he laughed. "It appears to me that you are going to a rather swell affair."

The sound of the drumming increased as the canoe glided toward a screen of small islands which concealed the bay on which King Taumbau's town was built. Somewhat later, as the canoe passed between two of the keys, Illington caught his first glimpse of the chief's village. What he saw was a great fire leaping against the dark background of the jungle. And now across the bay, borne on the thunder of the drum, came a faint chorus of many, many voices. There must have been hundreds, perhaps a thousand singers. Presently Illington could see them as the accidental lights from the flames fell on their naked, dancing figures.

The canoe traversing the evening sheen of the bay must have been conspicuous from the shore, because as Illington's party approached both the singing and the drumming stopped and the dancers came streaming down to the waterside to meet the newcomers. As the under-secretary drew near there was still light enough for him to make out the details of the scene; the innumerable bleached heads of the men, the tattooed faces of the women; nose-rings, distended ear-lobes, spears——

At the head of the merrymakers came a huge brown man with sunken eyes, a string of shark's teeth about his neck, and, odd to tell, a breech-clout made of crimson silk. His bleached hair, beaten into a yellowish mat on the top of his head, was more than ornate, and his big harsh features, the lift of his head, advertised the fact that Illington was now looking on King Taumbau.

By the side of Taumbau stood a small yellow man with oblique eyes, dressed in a yellow kimono. As the under-secretary drew near the Japanese lifted a hand and said in the best of English:

"This is Mr. Pyx, I presume. I trust you enjoyed your voyage up through these charming islands."

The canoe grated on the beach, and Illington stepped out.

"Pyx couldn't come," explained the under-secretary. "Illington's my name. Mr. Grimes here and I took Pyx's place. I believe I have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Shimo Nessu?"

The two men shook hands, appraising each other as nearly as they could behind their smiles, and the Japanese veered this self-introduction into a suave presentation of Illington to King Taumbau; and he did it in the native language too.

The huge brown man with the shark's teeth around his neck nodded down at the Englishman with a sort of untamed dignity and said something in a harsh voice.

Came a moment's pause in which the group were evidently waiting for an answer from Peter. The under-secretary was forced to ask—

"What did he say?"

The under-secretary sensed in Shimo Nessu astonishment and satisfaction that the whole interview should be entrusted in his hands, and the English diplomat who never even considered learning a word of the native jargon suddenly damned his negligence.

"He said," translated the Jap, "that you are here just in time for the *vilavilarevo*, and after that he will launch that war canoe."

Shimo Nessu pointed up the beach where lay one of the longest and handsomest canoes Peter had ever seen in the Fijis.

The craft was over a hundred feet long and was carved out of one solid log of hardwood. A racing-yacht could not have had finer lines. It lay upon the sand with its keen prow pointed toward the water. In its path were arranged bamboo-mats to protect its razor keel from being roughened in the launching.

At regular intervals a double row of unlighted torches were stuck in the sand, and between these two rows the canoe was to pass. Evidently the launching was to be no mean sight.

The huge Taumbau turned and called an order; and immediately the crowd went running back to the fire, which was flaming out of a great pit. At one side of the pit was a small platform, and on this mats were arranged for seats. As King Taumbau and his guests of honor walked to the dais, the king nodded cheerfully and said something which Shimo Nessu repeated in English as—"The men the *buli* brought up are all in good condition."

The under-secretary was determined to take a friendly interest in any point the chief cared to introduce.

"They might have been groomed for a marathon; they paddled up here without missing a stroke."

"That's a good sign," said Taumbau with genuine enthusiasm, putting a big hand on Illington's shoulder. "A sick man is not healthy."

The under-secretary made a note of the peculiar logical circle in which King Taumbau's brain traveled.

"Yes," he agreed, "that is undoubtedly true."

"My *buli* is a wonderful judge of men."

The under-study wanted to say just here that any man in the English service could be depended upon, thereby bracketing King Taumbau and all his court with the English Government at Suva: but it was the sort of sentence Shimo Nessu might censor. Illington turned and nodded toward the constable.

"Grimes!" he called. "Just step——"

But by this time King Taumbau had indicated the mats where his guests were to sit. For convenience he had placed the Jap between himself and Illington, and Grimes did not get a mat at all. A certain air about King Taumbau told Grimes, and Illington too, that the constable did not belong.

No sooner were the guest seated than dancing began. A string of men and youths began streaming around the fire, the drum started up, the chorus commenced anew.

The under-secretary's legs did not fit down comfortably on the mat as did those of the king and Shimo Nessu. His knees were lifted about three inches with an awkward effect of stiffness, and he couldn't flatten them down without pain in his thighs. He could not give the dancers his whole attention. However, their dark figures whirled rapidly between the under-secretary and the flames. They had hands on hips, elbows thrust out, and they danced by in an endless stream, all whirling and turning, until finally Peter's eyes lost the individual impressions in a maze-like confusion.

Then he became aware that the drum and the singing were keeping exact time with these whirling figures. It was the savage's method of entertainment, this focusing all the senses in one pulsing point. Under Illington's steady stare it developed a dream-like quality. Once as he watched the whirling silhouettes against the flames, the under-secretary thought, "I am being hypnotized," and blinked his eyes, but they were immediately reabsorbed; the flames, the singing, the antic figures.

Came a break in the rhythm, then something happened which increased his dream feeling a hundred-fold. Naked native priests, their faces covered with religious masks and their bodies painted in stripes and circles, came running out of the night with long brooms of green bamboo handles. They began pushing the fire away from one side of the pit. They seemed to get right up at the flames in their task. Illington thought in a dazed fashion—

"——, those fellows are going to scorch themselves."

The grotesque figures leaned right into and over the pit to shove away the coals with their long broom-handles. Then they began sweeping the bottom with the tufted ends of their brooms. And then a vibration of horror tingled along the under-secretary's back as the infernal priests stepped straight down into the pit and continued brushing the fire with their brooms in a great incandescent heap in the corner of the pit.

"This," said Shimo Nessu at the under-secretary's side, "is the *vilavilarevo*, native fire-walking. And the spell of the scene lowered Shimo's diplomatic reserve sufficiently for him to add—

"It is not as marvelous as the fire-walking in Japan."

From the edge of the dais Grimes repeated:

"Not as wonderful as Japanese fire-walking! Do you use a section of —— in Japan?"

Amid his fire-entranced staring King Taumbau caught fragments of this staccato conversation and had Grimes repeat it in Fijian.

Illington could not realize that the priests would not presently shrivel and die. Then it seemed to him that the fire had no heat, that it was a kind of fulgorous heap into which the fantastic figures of the priests might fling themselves as into so many shining feathers. The drum rocked the air rhythmically. The priests swept all the coals in a pile and displayed the stone bottom glowing with heat. Then they climbed out deliberately and flung their brooms back on the stones, where they burst into flames.

The singing and drumming redoubled, and the whole multitude followed the priests away from the fire-pit up the beach. King Taumbau and his guests arose from the dais and followed. Illington moved in a sort of automatism. Some one had lighted the torches about the canoe. They made two rows of bright spots against the night, and beyond them nothing was visible. The long war canoe and the bamboo-pads stood in bold relief against the darkness. The singing crowd flowed down to it, following the priests.

Presently Illington noted that these masked and painted clerics had among them eight perfectly naked men. As they neared the torches, two priests seized on each one of these men, picked him up bodily, carried and laid him, belly up, on one of the bamboo-pads in the track of the gigantic canoe. The light from the torches shone across the brown bellies of the men with a changing weft of reflections. The illusion of unreality somehow passed over from the fire-walking to the men stretched across the pads. The prostrate men made no more resistance than so many wax figures.

A great company of men swarmed about the long sides of the canoe ready to push the vessel. A priest stood ready to give the signal to start. A little thrill of dismay filtered through the under-secretary's feeling of unreality; and then, with a sharp shock, he recognized the man on the pad second from the canoe. It was Tanoa. It was the boy who had waited on his table and who gave up his place to come at the call of a king. Sight of his simple, stupid house servant stripped the illusion for the under-secretary at a single stroke. He turned abruptly to Grimes at his side. He felt as if he had just waked.

"I say, are they going to run that canoe *over* those men!"

The constable's face was knotted as if he were getting ready to endure something.

"It— It's one of them ceremonies, Mr. Illington, I told you about."

"Why, it will kill them!"

"Sure it will, sir; that's part of the ceremony."

"Why, this can't go on!" cried the under-secretary loudly. "It's murder! We can't stand here and permit murder, Grimes! Hem!" he called.

He lifted his arms.

"Hear! Gentlemen! Hear!"

Grimes pulled at him:

"Mr. Illington! Remember what Judge Shenstone said. He said——"

"To —— with what he said! Here, translate this to them!"

Peter was roaring now so that the whole mass of actors and spectators were looking at him. He stepped out of the crowd in between the row of torches.

"I forbid this in the name of the English Government!" he shouted.

A confusion started among the merry-makers. King Taumbau and his brown notables looked at the under-secretary with shocked faces. Shimo Nessu was saying—

"But, Mr. Illington, this is a custom——"

"What the —— do they want to run their canoe over *men* for?" demanded the under-secretary.

King Taumbau replied through the Japanese. The king had that air of distressed poise which a host exhibits when a guest at his dinner turns down his glass and indulges in a Prohibition speech.

"It is to give the strength of the men to my canoe, Mr. Illington. Every native war canoe is launched over living men."

"Well, it's a damnable custom!" cried the under-secretary. "And what an idea! Killing men to give your canoe strength!"

Grimes was interpolating in stage whispers:

"Mr. Illington, sir, he'll sell the island now! You're playing right into his hand!"

"This doesn't go!" shouted the under-secretary definitively, waving at the men to leave the canoe.

A turmoil started among them; shouts, expostulations in the native language. Peter could hear the word *qali* repeated over and over.

"Tell them, Grimes," roared Peter, "that if King Taumbau holds these eight men in *qali* and kills them, King George will hold King Taumbau in *qali* and hang him on a rope in front of the court-house."

While Grimes was translating this ultimatum, Peter ran to the victims stretched across the pads. He struck Tanoa on the chest.

"Get up from there. —— fool, come 'way up here to be squashed——"

Tanoa seemed to come out of a sort of coma. He stirred, blinked his eyes, then made an effort and sat up on the mat and looked at the lights, the crowd and the impending canoe. Peter went down the line smacking the other victims into action. Then he strode through the line of torches to King Taumbau and told him he was not to sell Reed Island. That the English Government didn't look on such a transfer with approval, that such a sale would meet the displeasure of King George, who held King Taumbau in *qali*.

The spell of the *vilavilarevo* was utterly gone. The natives were deeply angry and insulted, the under-secretary could see that, but now it made no great difference. The damage to King Taumbau's friendship was done, and he was in no personal danger. Forty-four years of experience with the English colonials have taught the natives in the archipelago never to interfere with an English official.

The whole crowd plainly felt swindled out of their just rights and amusements. It must have been something like a cold plunge to come out of the intense spell of the *vilavilarevo* into the monotony of an ordinary night again.

King Taumbau was very silent, but he went back down the beach with his guests. The crowd followed, and Peter could hear behind him snatches of outraged conversations and bursts of satiric laughter. The secretary's own gust of righteous indignation was cooling rapidly in the night, for no man, not even an English official, can be utterly insensitive to general censure.

Taumbau pointed out a hut in which the paddlers could sleep for the night. Then he indicated the finest hut in the village where Illington and Grimes might rest. The king bade Peter good night and wished him a pleasant sleep. If the under-secretary did not know the amenities of a court, King Taumbau did. Illington bowed a little stiffly—much as he had sat on the mat—and muttered something about English custom and law—there might have been something vaguely apologetic in his manner

THE two white men turned silently into their hut, and the somewhat amused and scornful crowd passed on down the beach. The hut where the two Englishmen were housed was just beyond the fire-pit, and a glow from the coals and stones shone through the latticed sides of the room and gave a faint illumination.

On the smooth earthen floor were several clean-smelling grass-mats. Grimes stretched himself out on one and observed, perhaps to the walls of the building—

"Well, we done more harm than good on this trip, I'm thinking."

The under-secretary was trying to consider just what quantity of clothing a man should remove to sleep on a mat, but he could not get his mind on the problem and presently ejaculated defensively—

"Well, —— it, could I stand there and see those wretches cut in two?"

"No-o-o, p'raps not," dragged out Grimes, "but every war canoe in the Fijis is launched exactly that way. This won't break it up. Old Taumbau will order some more men who are *qali* and do it over."

By keeping silent the secretary admitted the truth of this.

"And of course Reed Island sells now," pursued Grimes.

Under the constable's prodding the under-secretary's error grew huger and huger. Peter lay down on his mat, but the thought revolved tediously in his head that he had jeopardized the English South Seas for what? A very stupid servant. That was what he had done. It was Tanoa personally that actually had moved him. And now there would probably be a Japanese fort built on Reed Island, and in event of hostilities it might very well be that thousands of Englishmen would pay for his indiscretion.

The under-secretary could neither sleep nor rest. He got up, shook his shoulders, walked over to the wall and stared through the cracks in the lattice at the dull glow of the fire-pit. He thought he saw some one moving in the faint light, but he was not interested enough to make sure. He was seeing a fort, a low-lying, almost invisible modern fort on a sun-shot island——

Grimes must have divined what was in his chief's mind, for he spoke from the mat—

"Why not go to King Taumbau now and tell him we have withdrawn our objections, Mr. Illington?"

Peter cursed mentally; the vision of the fort persisted; he drew a long breath and flung out:

"—— it, I don't know of any better way out. —— this diplomatic service anyway! I tell you what, Grimes, there are men in what they think are hard berths, and they fancy they would jolly well like to be a diplomat. Well——"

The under-secretary threw up his hands.

"Are we going to hunt up King Taumbau, sir?"

"There is nothing else to do," answered Peter irritably.

Grimes got up with alacrity, and the two men turned out and started up the beach.

"They think a diplomat has always got easy sailing. Just—go on——"

He made a sardonic gesture.

"—like that—nothing disagreeable—certainly not—a diplomat——"

"I fancy a diplomat hits the rocks oftener'n you'd think," observed Grimes with wooden sympathy.

The under-secretary ceased talking.

As the two men were passing the fire-pit a shore breeze brought to their nostrils a very savory odor. It came from the pit and reminded both men that they were supperless. They veered instinctively out of their way and walked along the edge of the pit, looking down on the still glowing stones. Two huge calabashes sat on the stones gently simmering away. Some sort of vegetable was on, cooking. Peter's nose told him that much. A question to Grimes brought a prompt answer.

"They are boiling man Solanum, Mr. Illington," he said.

"What's that?"

"A kind of vegetable they always put in the pot when they cook a man," explained Grimes simply. "If they don't use it a boiled man gives 'em the belly-ache."

The under-secretary stared at his subordinate.

"Grimes! What are you talking about?"

"Eating men," returned the constable. "Didn't you know these black fellows eat each other when they can keep it hid?"

"Why, it's prohibited—I didn't know it still went on."

"If anything is prohibited it still goes on. That's why it's prohibited," philosophized the constable.

As Harrington looked at the two vessels something seemed to turn over in his stomach. The savory smell of the Solanums made him sick.

"They—put those beastly pots on for my poor paddlers!" gasped Peter in a sick voice.

"I—suppose so, sir."

Then after a moment—

"Shall we go on and speak to King Taumbau, sir?"

"No! —— it, no!" snapped Peter. "Do you think I'd put our paddlers in them!"

"I—I thought it was diplomatic, sir——"

"I don't know whether it is or not, and I don't give a ——!"

Grimes scratched his head.

"Yes, sir—I—feel much the same, sir."

The under-secretary stood in silence, watching the Solanums bubble in the glowing pit.

"By the way, sir," mused Grimes, "them pots weren't on the fire when we started down the beach to the canoe. They must have been put on since then."

"What of that?"

"Why, they've been put on, sir, since our paddlers were set free."

"That's a fact," agreed Peter a little apprehensively. "I wonder if those —— mean to slip around to where those boys are sleeping and——"

He looked back toward the men's hut.

"Say, perhaps I would better go down there and sleep with them?"

"Oh, don't do that, sir!" cried Grimes, scandalized. "You'd lose your *tong* sleeping in a hut with the natives."

"Lose my *tong?*"

"Yes, sir; you know, *bong tong*. If anybody's got to sleep with 'em and guard 'em I'll do it. I aren't got no *tong*."

"I see what you mean."

"Yes, and before either of us does

anything uncustomary, sir, just let me move out and investigate a bit. It won't hurt none."

The constable stood a moment longer and then by tacit consent of his superior moved off into the darkness.

Peter Kent Illington did not like to see Grimes go. He was not accustomed to sitting up at night with two pots of boiling Solanum that were waiting for some person to be cut up and dropped into them. Queer thoughts played through Illington's head as he stared at the pots in the pit. He recalled the legend of the Minotaur, that monster in Crete to whom the Greeks were forced to send their most beautiful youths to be slain and eaten. Now this King Taumbau, sending his *buli* to select "healthy" men, men in "good condition," reproduced that old Greek legend with a horrible realism.

The two ghastly calabashes bubbling away on the hot stones seemed to dissolve all civilization, to make it a sort of froth which most recently had bubbled up in the human race after millenniums of savagery—King Minos of Crete, calling the Olympian Greeks to pot! Millenniums ago, but here were these two calabashes still bubbling away today!

And the immolation of the paddlers at the launching of the war canoe—but no English battleship is ever launched but what across its bow is spilled champagne; softened symbol of the spilling of human blood. And to fail champagne brings bad luck, so the sailors believe; remnant of the old belief that the strength of the victim enters the vessel. A thousand thousand years, and the same beliefs in Downing Street and King Taumbau's village!

The calabashes boiled and boiled, dissolving the very flesh of Civilization from her secret skeleton of violence and superstition.

WHILE Peter sat chewing these salty thoughts came a crunching of sand and Grimes stepped into the faint light wearing the oddest smile Peter ever saw. The under-secretary looked at him with revulsion that any one could smile in such a horrible place. The constable came up close, looked at Peter queerly and said in a low tone—

"It's Shimo."

Illington stared up at him.

"What's Shimo?" he asked.

Grimes nodded mutely toward the calabashes.

The under-secretary looked at the constable with a presentiment of horror.

"What the —— do you mean, Grimes?"

"I mean they are for the Jap," explained the officer with his strange expression. "They've got him in their calaboose. He's the one they mean this for——"

He looked the under-secretary in the eye and nodded sidewise at the calabashes with a horrified grin showing in the faint light. After a moment he said—

"Well—that settles our difficulties."

"But how could it have come about!" aspirated Illington, utterly amazed. "What has he done—what could he have done?"

"Why nothing, nothing at all!" accented Grimes with an indignant note in his voice even for the Japanese. "You see it's like this. The Jap has been trying to keep his purchase of the island a secret. Old Taumbau saw that. Now the secret is out. You've discovered it. The old cannibal reasoned if Shimo was trying to keep the deal a secret it would be impossible for it to go through openly. So since the trade is gone, the only thing Taumbau can get out of the Jap now is to put him in a pen and start boiling Solanum."

"But Grimes! Grimes!" gasped the under-secretary. "Would he betray a guest after extending his hospitality?"

"Mr. Illington," growled the constable, "you don't know these Fijians. They are no better than tigers. They will eat their best friends, their own blood-kin. The only thing that stops 'em is us English."

He paused a moment in his upbraiding tone, then added queerly:

"Well—as I said—our troubles seem to be over. We—might as well go back to bed."

"Er—yes—seems so," agreed the secretary, staring into the dimly lighted pit.

Charles Peter Kent Illington arose slowly from where he sat with a feeling that he was moving in some sort of nightmare. He recalled that the old English barons also murdered and robbed guests. And that was recent, that was almost yesterday compared to the abysm of the past. He looked at his wrist-watch. A little of the luminous matter had scaled off his minute-hand, so both hands were now of the same length. It was either fifteen minutes after one o'clock or five minutes after three. Overhead the stars burned brilliantly.

The two men moved slowly back to their hut. Presently Grimes said—

"If we were in that cage and he was outside he wouldn't turn a finger to get us out."

"No, probably not," agreed the under-secretary.

And then he thought to himself:

"Certainly not; a Japanese has not had the moral training that is instilled in the English race. One couldn't expect——"

He broke off here as he became conscious that his cogitation was not a genuine thought at all but a mere string of self-adulatory words which white men use over and over and over in their thoughts about other races. It meant nothing at all. In fact, this thing he contemplated doing contradicted the stereotype flatly. The under-secretary stopped walking and put a hand on the constable.

"Grimes," he said, "this is impossible."

"How so?"

"We, as representatives of English law, can't permit it. We must go back and tell King Taumbau this is tabu. He will have to let that little man out of the cage."

Grimes stood thoughtfully in the darkness.

"We can't stop King Taumbau now, Mr. Illington."

"Why?"

"Because we have already crossed him once when he was launching his canoe. If we try to stop him again we'll get in trouble. These native kings will stand just so much and no more."

"I see," nodded the under-secretary. "You may be right. I dare say you are. Then we'll have to get Shimo Nessu off some other way. We can't let that happen—" he nodded at the pit—"you know that."

"But what are we going to do, sir?"

"If we could open the lock of the cage——"

"It hasn't got no lock. It just fastens out where the man inside can't get at it, and a guard stands there to watch and see that nobody else lets him out."

"Then it will be easy enough to get it open—there are two of us."

"Well, sure, if that's what you mean."

"That's all there is to do. We'd better get back to the prison now. It must be getting near morning. Come on."

The two men reversed their course on the beach once more when the constable said:

"Look here, sir, if we do this we'll stir up a hornets' nest and never get away from this —— place. I'm thinking you would better go down and wake up them paddlers, get 'em in the canoe ready to start, and I'll get the Jap out myself. You wait for us on the beach, and we'll make a dash for you."

The under-secretary agreed; the two men separated, and the constable's stocky form was soon lost in darkness as he moved down the beach.

Peter Illington hurried to the hut of his paddlers with disturbed thoughts. He realized he was doing a quixotic thing. The weather vane of his intentions seemed to point in every direction except toward the purpose which had brought him here. At this moment his volte-face was complete; he was now trying to rescue the Jap. And yet there seemed nothing else to do.

Amid this medley of impulses he fell back on his stock reaction of damning the diplomatic post in which he found himself. It was an instinctive and a wise procedure. Few practical men fail to substitute profanity for thought. Thought is an appeal to the conscious; profanity is an appeal to the subconscious, which is a surer and a subtler instrument. Thus the gods, after all, are justified.

ILLINGTON did not have to wait for his men. The poor wretches were awake, and a word to Tanoa brought the whole crowd out on the beach down to the canoe. They found their craft on the sand and pushed it far enough into the water so they could get afloat quickly. Peter ranged his men waist deep in the slight surf along the side of the canoe, ready to leap in and heave away on command. The little waves lapped, lapped, lapped at the slender boat and vanished murmurously down the strand.

A faint gray light was gathering at some vast height in the sky, and the stars looked as if they were worn for sleep. Illington tried to make out the hands on his wrist-watch again but failed. He listened and peered anxiously down the village and into the black jungle which marked the upper boundary of the beach. He held his mouth open to listen more intently. One of his men in the water shivered from cold.

In the midst of his concentration Peter heard a distant shout from the opposite end of the village; then came another and another, calls, answers, alarms. The under-secretary turned to impress his men with the need of increased attention.

The clamor in the village grew; it leaped from point to point. Dogs began to bark; came shouts. Suddenly a little nervous spasm swept over the men at the canoe. The deafening noise of the huge drum crashed on their ears. It seemed to shake the very jungle and the wind-swept clouds scudding down the pale sky. The paddlers appeared on the verge of flying.

The under-secretary stepped into the water and put a hand on the bow.

"Steady there, boys," he warned; "we're not going to leave Grimes—or the Jap."

Just then Illington saw figures come flying up the beach. In the turmoil he heard Grimes' voice berating:

"What did you let him out for! Plague on you brown fools, let that Jap out of his cage! He knocked that jailer on the head and escaped! I'll have King Taumbau cook every man jack of you! Gone! Find him! Get him! Look back up the beach! He's among the houses!"

Amid the rush of figures in the gathering light Peter could see the white duck of the constable waving the natives back up into the village. Some went as the white man directed, but scores ran on down the beach, spreading out in a fan in their search for the escaped Jap. Grimes himself was making rapidly for the canoe.

"All right, Mr. Illington," he shouted through the gusty morning. "—— the luck! Jap's got away! Look sharp!"

Peter was looking sharp. He was clutching the prow of the canoe for fear the paddlers would make a premature dash. He couldn't hold them long. Grimes came running up. Peter felt the animal impulse to flight tingling through his own body. Since he was going he wanted to go.

He was saying in a nervous voice:

"Steady, men! Steady!"

Suddenly out of the jungle, right opposite the canoe, burst a yellow, compact figure who came dashing across the beach like a hare. At the same instant the brown Fijians came howling and yelling to head him off.

A constriction leaped in Illington's throat. The brown men would catch him. The Jap did not have a rag of his kimono left after his race through the jungle. He ran stark naked and came dodging and side-leaping among the natives who were now swarming down on him. They were a pack of hounds running over a rabbit. One moment the stocky yellow man would be absolutely hidden; the next moment he would swerve out and flash on toward the canoe again.

It was the most amazing feat of broken-field running Peter Illington ever saw. English football tactics leaped out here and there. The under-secretary wanted to cheer, applaud. A huge brown man came boring in not twenty feet up the beach right between the canoe and the runner. That was too much for Peter.

"Grimes!" he yelled. "Torpedo that brown ——! Ram him!"

With his right hand he motioned the paddlers.

"Move out! Begin to shove off! We've got to make a flying start!"

But Shimo Nessu did not require Grimes' assistance. He dashed straight at the native. His squat yellow figure dodged down and under. Next moment the huge brown man rose whirling in air with arms and legs spread out like a thrown frog. Right under him shot Shimo, and by the time the brown man drummed down on the sand again the Jap was at the water's edge.

By this time Grimes was aboard, Illington had his paddles in motion and the canoe was twenty feet out and gathering speed when Shimo hit the surf. The Japanese made two long hops and came foaming over the stern, bringing a rain of spray.

The naked Jap seized a paddle and strained with the other eight paddlers. The yellow man was a dynamo. The canoe gathered speed, the little waves changed from a *thutter* to a purl. Illington in the stern turned and watched the brown men on shore. The whole crowd rushed over to the long, trim war canoe. They ganged about it and within a minute had the keen craft moving evenly over the bamboo buffers to the water. Peter shouted a warning to his own men.

The moment the war canoe touched water the men at the prow flounced inside and seized paddles. As it moved on in, those amidships vaulted aboard, and so at a certain point there was a continual foaming splash which transformed pushers outside into paddlers on the inside. Next moment the long craft was headed toward Peter, skimming along at the long rhythmic swing of the South Seas.

The natives shouted their threats as they came, but their voices were softened by the distance the smaller canoe had gained. Within three minutes the fugitives were darting between two of the islands which screened the bay. Somehow the shape of the high, stony islands focused the uproar so that as Peter fled between them, the yells of the boatful of brown demons roared down on the fugitives with threats of death and the pot. The next moment they had passed this peculiar spot and darted out into the noise and turmoil of the slashing seas and rising tide outside the harbor.

In the lee of the islands Illington had not known that a half-gale was blowing. Now as he rushed into the combers and was lifted and swung and lifted again, he realized what a slender chance his paddlers had of escaping the greyhound speed of the war canoe. The greater length of the Fijian boat would give it a wide advantage on these plunging seas.

The air was filled with flying spray, and a continual booming of waves against the rocky islands shattered the air. In some places combers thundered against the rocks and were thrown back in heavy return waves; in other places they shot skyward in great white fountains; in still others, they rolled over reefs and raced landward in a mad froth.

Illington clung to his seat and twisted about, looking back to see the war canoe come out of the harbor. At one minute, in a trough, he would see nothing but the curves and crests of rushing green waves; the next he would be flung skyward for a ten-second view of the whole seascape. At every lift he watched the harbor entrance but saw nothing except the whipped and roaring seas.

A sudden hope came to Peter that the natives had given up the chase. His men were still straining every muscle, and the under-secretary was about to call to them to take it a little easier when not two hundred yards behind, he saw skim over the crest of a roller, the long canoe and her brown crew. Peter changed his signal to rest to a shout of warning. The paddlers bent more furiously to their task. From far behind came a faint howl from the war canoe. The next moment they dropped from sight, and Peter's own boat swung downward again.

THE quick shift from hope to imminent danger left Illington in miserable suspense. He rose and could see nothing; he fell again. At any moment in this hide and seek of the waves, the long war canoe might shoot over the crest of a wave and hiss down into the trough where his own stubby boat labored.

Ten minutes later he glimpsed the pursuers again. They were not a hundred yards distant. He could even make out the bleached, matted hair of the paddlers. He could see their grimaces. One of the brown men threateningly, or perhaps sportively, rubbed his belly.

Peter Illington wondered with an amazed ache why in the world he had put in jeopardy the lives of his paddlers, Grimes and himself to rescue this ill-starred Jap. A moment later, on the crest of a wave, the wind beat off Peter's sun-helmet. It went flying along, then rolled for a few seconds on the surface of the sea until the water gripped it and melted it into the general greenness.

The paddler who piloted the fugitives skirted the islands narrowly. Now on the next wave, Peter saw dead ahead a pillar of white rise up in the bright sunshine, sparkle, flash and then vanish. It was some new phase of wave form among the islands.

Behind, the war canoe was crawling steadily up on the fugitives. Peter could see them often now. He could see the reel of the long craft as it came slicing along the moving slopes. He began trying to calculate how long it would be until it overhauled him. He wondered if the natives would carry his whole party back alive. He remembered the calabashes simmering gently in the glowing pit. And he thought of King Minos of Crete and the Olympian Hellenes whom he brought to pot. Just a few pages back in history, his own race!

He stared fixedly at the approaching canoe. Every paddler lifted, swung forward, made his stroke, in exact time. The thing looked like some slender demon's horse striding toward him with long deliberate steps. It would stride up to him, overtake him, and then abruptly sea, islands, sky would vanish for him and become nothing. He stared, fascinated by this obliterating canoe. The seas about him became a picture, a tenuous reality that presently would burst like a bubble into nothing.

Now as his own canoe stroked up the slope of one wave, the war boat rode down into the trough he fled. As he sank on the other side, the intervening wave hid the Fijians a few moments, then the sharp, delicate prow cut the sky far above his head. As it dropped, he went up. He could not take his eyes from this fatal seesaw which was rocking him out of existence.

An increasing and regular thunder which had been growing for several minutes, at last penetrated even Peter Illington's hypnosis. He turned and looked forward to see what this new uproar meant.

Not fifty yards in front of him he saw a column of water mount at least a hundred feet in air, break and fall back with the sound of a Niagara. As the next wave broke the column mounted again, changing its green bulk into a dazzling white. By this time the return waves began shaking at Peter's canoe. In the trough of each roller appeared the long, curving, gray walls of the atoll which Peter had crossed the day before.

The fugitives were driving straight at this maelstrom. And Peter suddenly realized and approved, that his canoeists had chosen this sort of death to the calabashes of King Taumbau.

The boom and shudder of that leaping column of water suddenly made the war canoe seem a small and indifferent thing. Every wave advanced Peter's canoe in great steps. Only once he flung a glance over his shoulder. To see if the natives were following. They were.

Peter gripped the sides of his seat and leaned forward. He was rushing toward the water-front in great swinging curves. As the column spouted upward he could see tossed away from it masses of water as large as his head, as large as a barrel. Between the roars of the spout the whole surface of the waves hissed with a yeasty foam.

A kind of windy thrill went down Peter's backbone as he rode the wave he thought would land him in the typhoon. It fell a little short. The gray and green walls of the atoll rose above him through the water. He was headed directly for a gap in it. The next wave shot him upward in a big half-circle. As the little canoe drove in, a whole universe of water seemed to boil, to lift—the canoe was rising, soaring——

Peter Illington was amidst a thundering chaos of water. It shot up and around him as if two mighty hoses were playing up out of the sea. Peter saw one of these upshooting masses catch a paddle from one of his men and lose it in the sky. The fugitives were in a narrow gap between two typhoons of water. Side pressure of the two columns lifted them fifteen or twenty feet. For two or three seconds the white man was confused amid watery confusion. But the little segment of wave on which he rode did not break into the sky, but rolled solidly up, over and inside the atoll.

Just as the two columns were falling the little canoe shot down into the interior of the atoll in a great sluice of foam. The vessel was almost full of water, but was uninjured. As the column of surf crashed behind them, the water-logged canoe struggled away into the calm, clear water of the atoll.

Peter was drenched. His face stung, his eyes smarted from the spray. He turned and stared back at the typhoon through which he had lived. It arose again, leaped skyward and fell with monotonous thunder. As the fugitives struggled across to the outlet on the lee side, Peter saw something that set his nerves quivering again. He saw the war canoe appear in an upspout of the surf. It seemed to stand a moment in the midst of the white wall, then he saw the front half of the long delicate vessel bend upward, came a faint crackling amid the thunder as if some one had snapped a macaroni; the stern of the canoe took another crazy angle.

Then for a moment the white waterspout was filled with little whirling brown figures; he even saw the bleached hair of one. The next moment it all crashed down and was gone. When the next wave shot up to the skies it was clean and white again.

PETER ILLINGTON stayed out at sea until the auction at Suva was well over. When he finally paddled in, he discovered that Judge Shenstone had received a cablegram from Downing Street and that a notice of the alien exclusion act was stuck up on the simple old blackboard outside the shabby state houses in Trafalgar Square.

Afterward Peter was talking to the Chief Justice, and both men agreed that it seemed as if Providence moved itself in a very special manner in this instance, as in many other instances, for the preservation of the British Empire. And so it seemed.

Some time afterward, the cable dispatches bore the news that Shimo Nessu, one of the youngest and most aggressive ministers in the Japanese Navy Department, had committed *hari-kiri* in his home in Kobe, the House of Eleven Terraces. And his young wife, the daughter of Admiral Neogi, had gone with her husband.

Eventually Mr. Illington discharged his servant, Tanoa, because, as he explained to his man, he could not take a cup of tea from his hands without seeing two —— calabashes boiling on hot stones and it "threw him off his feed."

Tanoa looked reproachfully at his master.

"Then why did you take me away from King Taumbau?" he asked. "He will never send for me again."

The under-secretary stared.

"You—you brown riddle, you don't mean you wanted to stay! Is that it?"

The absurd figure with the bleached hair made a hopeless gesture.

"Ndengei! Tanoa's ghost would have protected a king's ship and Tanoa's body would have been part of a king's body! Ndengei!"

But it was useless to rave to Ndengei, the servant knew that. The brown man with the bleached hair turned and wandered out of the bungalow into the wind-swept boulevard. He did not know where he was going nor what he would do. Dive for pearl shells maybe, gather vanilla beans maybe, maybe beg. He did not know.

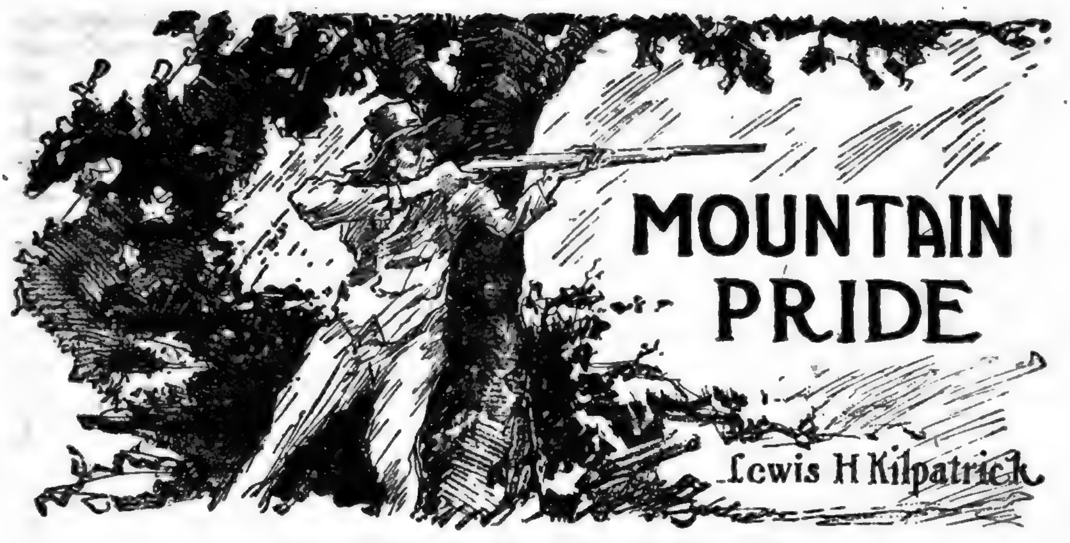
It made no difference; he had lost his easy berth and was still alive. It was useless to pray to Ndengei, that great serpent that laid eggs in the sand and had crawled away, eons ago. Ndengei did not even know that the eggs had hatched, or what they had hatched. Ndengei cared nothing about any of it at all.

A FRENCH VIEW OF AMERICAN AID

by Leonard H. Nason

AN AMERICAN troop train stopped at Le Mans one night in June 1918. The cars were uncoupled from the engine, and one by one pushed up on a motor conveyor to be taken back of the station, and stored for the night. French freight cars, the famous "forty men or eight horses" type, are about half the size of American cars, and the use of these motor conveyors saves much time that would ordinarily be used in switching. The last car was loaded with barrack bags, and was considerably heavier than the others. Two Frenchmen were unable to push it up the incline to the conveyor, so they called upon some of the watching Americans for aid. These last responded gleefully. One of them mounted to the little house where the brakeman sits, and the rest, to the number of about one hundred and fifty, proceeded to distribute themselves about the car, some on the roof, others on the ladders, and a great number at one end. Yo-ho-ing mightily, they pushed the car along, and finally broke into a run. There were cries of alarm from the French, shouts of protest and "Put on the brake! Put on the brake!" from those on the top and sides of the car, while the cab of the motor conveyor began to shed Frenchmen. The car shot up one side of the incline, down the other, leaped the tracks and crashed into the conveyor cab, totally wrecking the latter. The hearty laughter of the Americans was most displeasing to the French railway employees.

"That's America for you," complained the *Chef de Gare*. "We ask them for help, and they just come over here and break things up!"



MOUNTAIN PRIDE

Lewis H Kilpatrick

Author of "The First Born," "Troubled Waters," etc.

SHERIFF HAWKINS warned Prohibition Agent Brown against attacking Yocum Knob; but that Federal officer, zealous, fearless and fresh from a series of successful raids in the Blue Grass, would not be deterred.

"I believe young Finley Yocum and his gang are operating what'll prove to be the biggest still ever captured in these Kentucky Mountains," he said. "I hear stories of it all over the State; and, situated right on the edge of the lowlands, it has plenty of customers. You won't go after it with me, Mr. Hawkins?"

The burly sheriff played a moment with his drooping yellow mustache and shook his head.

"Naw," he replied frankly; "it's my way to let 'shiners alone up here so long as they're making pure corn liquor and don't raise too much fuss. Finley—'Fightin'' Finley, some call him—is keeping to them rules; and I counsel you again, Mr. Brown, not to meddle with him. He's dangerous as a treed 'coon, and him and his brother Elmer are two of the best shots in these hills. You leave 'em alone."

The prohibition agent only laughed, not surprized at Clint Hawkins' refusal to cooperate, and returned to the Blue Grass to enlist a posse. A few days later that December word reached the mountain country seat of what had happened.

Yocum Knob, near the western border of the country, faced a cleared broad valley; a creek, twisting around its base on three sides, served as a natural moat; and on the fourth side, eastward, stretched high, broken country, the beginning of the mountains proper. Half-way up the face of the knob, which was screened even in Winter by scrub black-jacks and evergreens, the Yocums had their still. It was under a projecting cliff, its front protected by an embrasure of heavy logs, and from it the ground dropped steeply to the creek bank.

Agent Brown and his posse, advancing at dawn, reached the embrasure apparently unobserved. Receiving no challenge, they believed the place deserted and were off their guard. Then, suddenly, the still-house door opened, a volley of bullets crashed forth, and the agent fell, shot through the head and heart. His deputies, panic-stricken, retreated, barely rescuing his body, and did not stop until they gained the nearest Blue Grass town, Hinkston.

Sheriff Hawkins heard the news and sighed. Hawkins had liked Brown and was sorry for his bereaved family; but, then, he had had no business raiding in the sheriff's county against his advice.

Clint considered the affair ended and set to work on his tax-books.

But the affair was not ended. Within thirty-six hours came the report that a second and larger posse of Federal officers, operating out of Hinkston, had attacked Yocum Knob. This posse got only as far as the creek when, after an exchange of shots with the hidden moonshiners, it too retreated precipitantly with the loss of one dead and another wounded.

"Clint, don't you reckon we'd better do somethin' about this?" ventured old County Judge Combs, entering the sheriff's office. In his hand was a copy of a Lexington paper, just received, which featured on its front page the latest unsuccessful raid.

"The folks down below are getting excited," the judge continued, "and 'low we ought to capture the fellers guilty of these two killin's. You're high sheriff of the county. 'Pears to me you'd best ride over and talk to them Yocums."

Clint Hawkins banged his desk with a muscular fist and swore an angry oath.

"Jedge, who started this here trouble anyway?" he demanded. "I didn't. It was me that told Mr. Brown to keep off'n Finley Yocum at the first. He wouldn't heed me—and now that them smart-Alecky Government marshals have kicked up such a ruction, they can go plumb on through with it alone. I don't aim to take a hand one way or the other. Understand?"

The old man protested—feebly, for Hawkins was czar of his bailiwick:

"But, Clint, you know the marshals are right. It's p'intedly against the law these days to still and traffic in liquor."

The big sheriff grunted.

"Yes, it's against the law—but a heap of laws have been writ without knowledge of all the folks they'd touch. Mountain-men ain't Blue Grass men, jedge, and furriners will stand for meddlin' that our boys won't.

"What's more," he added, "Fightin' Finley and his kin are sober, honest 'shiners. They ain't made nothing but pure liquor since I've been sheriff. It's the fellers who run the mean, p'ison kind that I hate. I'll go after them every time without asking help of the Government or anybody else!"

Whereupon, with this reiteration of his policy, Clint Hawkins turned from the judge and lapsed into stubborn silence.

But he soon found that he could not so easily disregard the general situation and the events and sentiment that grew out of it.

Had the assaults on Yocum Knob been made by native officials, an affray strictly between mountaineers, the outside world would have given it only passing notice. Also, had not certain metropolitan papers felt the mid-Winter dearth of news and consequently been eager to seize and feature any sensational happening, the murder of two Federal agents and the wounding of a third would not have drawn scare headlines and editorial comment.

As it was, however, the prowess of the out-State press focused the attention of its reader-millions on the murders of Yocum Knob; and the Kentucky dailies, partly in self-defense, took up the cry for vengeance and demanded that the commonwealth be cleansed of this, its latest public shame. Mass meetings were held in many lowland cities, resolutions of indignation passed and funds raised to aid in the capture and prosecution of the mountain outlaws. These gatherings in turn reacted on the press, and editorial pens frothed while reportorial imaginations ran riot with the facts.

Sheriff Hawkins, a subscriber to the State's largest paper, which reached his isolated village a day late, was astounded by what he read in its columns. Copies of other papers began to appear in his mail, too, sent, complimentary, from different parts of the country. He quickly learned that his refusal to join Prohibition Agent Brown on his fatal raid was known apparently throughout the United States. The fact that he had made no effort to apprehend the murders was also broadcast and the subject of scathing criticism.

"Now don't that beat ——!" he exclaimed furiously to himself. "Just because I won't take orders from a passel of nosey marshals every newspaper in the world up and calls me a coward. They 'low I'm as guilty as them who done the killing, since I won't arrest 'em. I'd like to know what business furriners have telling me how to run my county!"

The truth was that Clint Hawkins was little fool and less coward. His Calvinistic conscience clearly distinguished between right and wrong; but, knowing something of human nature, he reckoned with folk as they were, not as idealists held they should be, and realized that saints are not made by law. Normally he policed his mountain county with a firm but gentle hand—a hand that could clench itself into a merciless fist, however, when his authority was openly defied.

What he disliked most was outside interference, as he considered it; the coming into his territory of State or Federal Government officers. When that occurred Clint was automatically on the defensive with the native party sought. His official pride was insulted and his highland loyalty intensified.

In the present instance he had no love for the Yocums, who had given him trouble on previous occasions, and he privately admitted that they were in the wrong. But he wished to bring them to justice in his own mountain way, hotly resented what he deemed a foreign invasion and therefore determined on a position of sullen neutrality.

SPEEDILY following his talk with County Judge Combs, came a letter from the chief of their judicial district. The circuit judge, a citizen of the Blue Grass, formally inquired what steps the sheriff was taking against the Yocums, urged prompt and drastic action and concluded by saying that unless such action was taken he would call upon the governor for troops.

Clint replied impertinently, consigned the governor and his troops to something much warmer than a mountain December, made the impossible demand that the Federal posses cease their operations in his, Sheriff Hawkins', county and added more diplomatically that an attack of rheumatism at present held him bedfast and inactive.

When word came that State Director Sherman was on his way to the county seat to confer with the local authorities and seek their cooperation, Clint limped a few times around the court-house square, complained to every one he met of painful and swollen limbs and then went home and to bed.

Nor would he grant the State director a single interview. Sherman, calling at the sheriff's home, heard anguished groans within, listened politely as Clint's wife conveyed his excuses and sent a terse answer:

"Please tell your husband, Mrs. Hawkins, that we won't bother him farther. It's the United States Government primarily that's being defied, and under the circumstances we'll no longer consider your local officials even possible allies. Good evening."

The next day Clint read that the Governor of Kentucky had offered rewards of one thousand dollars for Finley Yocum and five hundred dollars for his brother Elmer. Both of them had been recognized by possemen who witnessed the murder of Brown. And the offer called for them dead or alive.

The sheriff summoned his deputy, Dave Arnett, to his bedside. Dave, gaunt, gray and keen-featured, had fought Indians on the Western plains in his youth and despite his sixty-odd years was still a vigorous man-hunter.

Clint, propped up in bed in his red-flannel underwear, tapped the governor's published proclamation with a calculating forefinger.

"Dave," he began slowly, "this here means that Finley and Elmer are blockaded in our county. Maybe it won't be safe for 'em even to quit their own neighborhood now. For if they try to run far somebody's shore to set about earning that fifteen hundred dollars. The show-down's got to be right here. Ain't that the way you figger it?"

The taciturn deputy nodded.

"Wal," continued Clint, and the words seemed to hurt him, "I reckon you'd better drop by Yocum Knob and tell Finley he ain't got much chance. Say that I counsel him not to go any farther with his foolishness. He's done enough. And, Dave, don't 'low to nobody but him that I've spoke as I have."

"I won't."

Dave Arnett smiled grimly, nodded again and rose to go.

Before he returned with his report, a third battle took place at Yocum Knob. State Director Sherman had set up headquarters at Hinkston and there rallied Federal agents from all over Kentucky. Spurred by the press and the excited public, heedless of miry roads and threatening Winter weather, the director led a company of fifty heavily armed men into the hills. He divided his force, sending half of it to attack the knob from the rear while he advanced with the remaining twenty-five men across the fronting open country.

That night a sleet-storm ravaged the knobs. The flanking party got lost among the cliffs and hollows, suffered severely from the cold, and its members returned to Hinkston as best they could, individually and in pairs, and mostly afoot, without having fired a shot.

Sherman, unconscious of this and expecting support, advanced his posse in skirmish formation through the icy darkness, waded the freezing creek and attained the steep knobside. An hour later when he counted his men, a safe distance from the unraided stronghold, two were slightly wounded and three missing.

The following afternoon one of the missing agents 'phoned him from the nearest lowland village. The other two men were dead, he told Sherman. He had been picked up on the knob where he fell, blindfolded and taken to what he supposed was the still-house. There he was fed and his wound bandaged, and later he and the two corpses were put in a road-wagon and hauled to the outskirts of the village.

"I was thar and gone afore the fight started," Deputy Arnett reported to his chief. "Finley treated me well and listened at all I had to 'low. But he says tell yo' he can't lay down now; he's gone too fer. He knows the fix he's in, but he ain't skeered. He'll never be took alive, he swears—and, Clint, I'm sartain he means hit. Fightin' Finley's got his war-paint on, and he'll hold that knob to the finish."

Sheriff Hawkins picked a moment at the quilt that covered him, then he heaved a resigned sigh.

"All right, Dave," he muttered; "you're a witness that I've done my best to stop this trouble. If them Yocums won't give up peaceful, they won't. A man sick as I am can't do no more about it, shore."

And he reached toward a pile of late newspapers on the bed beside him.

Contained in those papers were certain headlines and editorials that burned into Clint's very soul. From a Cincinnati composing-room came the caption:

ARMAGEDDON!

Kentucky Moonshiners Gather at Yocum Knob

Government Agents Prepare for Big Battle with Host of Outlaw Mountaineers

Crisis in U. S. Enforcement

An Eastern daily headed a double-column dispatch:

KENTUCKY COUNTY IN REBELLION

Mountain Officials Join Moonshiners in Defying Eighteenth Amendment

Region, Notorious for Its Illiteracy, Acknowledges Fighting Finley Yocum Its Master—"Like Sodom and Gomorrah!" Says New York Bishop

A New England editor wrote in part:

> The churches that send missionaries to Africa and the Orient might well list the Kentucky Mountains among their fields of work. As proven by current happenings in that country, there are heathens in the United States as well as abroad. Let us convert Americans first.

A brother journalist in the West, speaking of Clint Hawkins' county, declared—

> Civilization must be carried to such communities on the point of the bayonet.

From a Louisville sanctum rang the appeal:

> Let every true Kentuckian first blush with shame; then, with chin squared and shoulders erect, erase that blush by offering himself for military service against the mountain renegades. "A chain is no stronger than its weakest link," and this proud commonwealth is being judged by the failure of self-government in its outlaw county. It is for Kentuckians, unaided, to cleanse their State in the eyes of the world.

Sheriff Hawkins, rereading these words in the dimming light of his room, twisted his fat body until the bed-slats creaked, and tugged at his mustache, scowling. His wounded official vanity ceased to hurt him, and now he suffered only as a mountaineer.

"Knowed for our 'illiteracy' are we?" Sheriff Hawkins growled to himself. "Outlaws and heathens—not just a few, but the whole passel of us. Ought to be learned civilization with a rifle-gun. Ain't able to govern ourselves, and a shame to Kaintucky. No better than niggers and Chineymen—yes, every man and woman in these hills."

He swore aloud:

"—— that Finley Yocum and all his kin! He shore has played these mountains a mean trick!"

None knew better than Clint Hawkins that the large majority of his fellow hillmen were peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Comparatively few of them were interested in the illicit liquor traffic or had ever harmed a human being. But these good citizens, by the primitive nature of the country, lived mainly in isolation, each man from necessity the protector of his home and family; and for that reason they feared to take independent action against such desperadoes as the Yocums, because of probable reprisals.

Also, it must be admitted, the same provincial loyalty that influenced Sheriff Hawkins, influenced them too in the present crisis. Freemen, and jealous of their rights, they resented the entrance of outlanders into their civic affairs and instinctively sympathized with the hunted moonshiners.

Yet, even though he was confined to bed, Clint's political sense detected a change in local public sentiment. He somehow knew that the citizens of his county were sickening of Fightin' Finley and his defiance of the law. At first the mountaineers had gloated over his beating off the "furriners;" then they held their tongues and began to think; now they realized the seriousness of the situation to themselves and felt its reproach.

That evening, after the sheriff's wife had given him his supper and lighted the kerosene lamp in his room, Judge Combs called. The old man was plainly worried.

"Clint, how're you feeling?" he inquired, taking a chair by the bed.

"Poorly, jedge, poorly," groaned Clint, shaking his head feebly. "I never suffered such misery before in my life!"

"Wal," declared the judge, "I ain't very pert myself—but somebody around this county seat ought to be well enough to do something and do it purty quick."

His gray eyebrows knit over sharp black pupils.

"Clint," he resumed, "an hour ago the circuit jedge teleyphoned me from Hinkston. He told me a few things he 'lowed I'd want to know. Early this morning, he says, after that fray at Yocum Knob last night, he sent to the governor for soldiers. A battery of artillery and several machine guns, as they call 'em, are on their way to the knob now; and tomorrow a company of infantry lands at Olympia Station, marches through to here and then goes on to fight the Yocums from behind. Every soldier of the State Guard is being got ready, says the jedge; and if they can't whop the 'shiners, the governor will ask the fellers at Washington for more soldiers and a few airships. He's swore to tame this county if it takes a hundred years and a million men to do it."

"But, jedge," exploded Clint, rising on his elbow, "all this ain't the *county's* fault! It's just them 'shiners who've broke the law."

"Makes no difference," retorted the old man. "The governor holds that since we haven't stirred ourselves to stop this mischief we ain't able to stop it. That's why him and the United States are going to take over the county and put it under martial law. They 'low we mountain folks ain't fitten to rule ourselves."

"Gosh!"

Hot sweat broke out on Clint Hawkins' suddenly crimson face. He reared in his bed and glared wrathfully at the footboard, his huge fists clenched on the coverlid in his lap.

"It shore is a mighty sad plight we're in," the judge continued mournfully. "I never reckoned I'd live to see the day when Kaintucky mountain officers would have to call on furriners to do their fightin' for 'em. It's always been my idee that no man up here ever got so bad that there weren't a few among us who could master him."

Clint turned on the old man.

"But, jedge," he protested again, "the papers 'low that 'shiners and bootleggers from all over the hills are gathering at Yocum Knob. There must be a clean hundred of 'em with Finley now, and more a-comin'."

Judge Combs nodded.

"Yes," he drawled, "it'll take real soldiers to handle 'em proper. Don't you feel bad about it, Clint. There ain't a sheriff in the whole country, I reckon, who's up to whoppin' that crew. It's a good thing we got a governor and the United States to pertect us—yes, it is!"

The bedridden officer abruptly changed the subject of conversation; but an hour later after the judge had told him good night there was a sudden and radical change in his condition.

His face still flushed, but with agile limbs, Clint got out of bed, dressed, put a roll of newspapers in his hip pocket and buckled a holster containing a .38 special to his belt. Next he went to the barn, saddled his horse and led it through the deserted village streets to Dave Arnett's door.

There Sheriff Hawkins held a whispered consultation with his deputy.

"Dave," he concluded, "I want thirty of the best fightin' men in the county. You start riding after 'em now and have 'em all here together by tomorrow noon. I oughtn't to be more than a couple of hours with Finley after I reach the knob. But somethin' may happen between me and him—and if I'm not back by one o'clock you and your men sot in and do what I'd want done. Understand?"

YOCUM KNOB was a good fourteen miles from the county seat, reached from there by steep and rutted roads. The December night was windy and cold, but a heavy checkered mackinaw and the quickened blood in his veins kept the sheriff warm. He knew every acre of the country and felt little need of caution for the first ten miles of his journey. But when he reached the holdings of the Yocums and the Skaggses, their kinfolk, he made his horse walk and kept his right hand on his holster.

Nothing happened, however, and a clear day was breaking when he started up the trail that ascended a ridge leading to the rear of the knob. Atop the ridge, he spied a mountaineer with a rifle, lounging behind a tree, farther down the trail. It was young Ira Skaggs, Fightin' Finley's cousin.

"Howdy, Ira!"

"Mornin', Clint!"

The sentry eyed him suspiciously, but made no hostile move.

"Where's Finley and the rest of the boys?"

Ira jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Up on the knob, I reckon."

Then—

"Air ye ridin' alone?"

"Yes," answered the sheriff; "I always ride alone when I'm on friendly business. You might give Finley a holler, just to let him know I'm coming."

Ira gave voice to a crude but eloquent mountain yodel, and Clint continued along the trail unchallenged.

Reaching the rear of the knob, he dismounted and tethered his horse. A steep climb, a foot-path twisting around the crags and cliffs, and after several minutes he gained the broad ledge on which the still-house was built. The ledge was well screened from the valley by pines and cedars. Just outside the open still-house door blazed a camp-fire, and gathered about it were three men—Fightin' Finley, Elmer Yocum and their bearded uncle, Reuben Skaggs. All were armed.

Finley was down on one knee, fondling a kitten that rolled on its back, his slouch hat pushed aslant on his head, his dark, youthful features smiling. His companions met Sheriff Hawkins' approach with sullen scrutiny, but Finley, looking up, only lessened his smile to a grin.

"Sot yerself on that nail-keg, Clint," he invited, indicating the seat. "I 'low ye've been up most of the night and air purty tired."

Before accepting such hospitality the sheriff unbuckled his holster and hung it on the door. The Yocum brothers acknowledged the courtesy by likewise discarding their weapons; but Reuben Skaggs, taking his rifle with him, joined his son Gus who was keeping watch behind a holly-bush, half-way down the knobside.

"Where's all them 'shiners and bootleggers that joined you from other parts of the mountains?" Clint first inquired, glancing about searchingly.

Finley and Elmer were surprized.

"Why, thar ain't nobody here but me 'n' Elmer and Uncle Rube and his two boys," replied the elder brother. "And we didn't let the Skaggses mix in till yisterday."

"What?"

Clint in turn was surprized.

"You don't mean to tell that just you two have done all this mischief alone?"

Elmer, a weak counterpart of his dominant brother, licked his hairless lips uneasily at the question; but Finley in a glow of vanity answered frankly:

"O' course we two done hit all, Clint. Hit don't take more'n a couple o' true-shootin' rifle-guns to whop off a few revenuers, 'specially when them guns air up high and well kivered, and their targets ain't. By keepin' our eyes al'ays open and usin' repeaters, I reckon we've fooled the marshals into thinkin' thar's 'most a dozen of us."

The mountaineer laughed loudly and slapped his knee. To him it was a huge joke.

Clint Hawkins leaned forward on his nail-keg, grinning.

" 'Most a dozen?" he repeated. "Why, boy, they're shore there's every one of a thousand men up here. The newspapers are norating it that all the blockaders in Kaintucky are gathering on this knob for a big show-down battle with the Government. That's how bad you've fooled 'em."

Then the sheriff became serious, took

the roll of selected newspapers from his hip pocket and handed them to the Yocums.

"Read what I've marked in them," he said shortly.

As the brothers read, spelling out each word, he continued:

"You boys certainly have given us mountain folks a mighty hard name. You've disgraced the whole county and State of Kaintucky. People are talking up about us all over the world, saying no end of mean things that wouldn't be said but for you two. And, boys, it's got to stop. That's why I'm here. Understand?"

Finley, a bit dazed by what he was reading, protested:

"Why, Clint, 'most all this here is a lie. We ain't nowise that bad. And ye've al'ays 'lowed yourself that thar wasn't much harm in makin' good, pure liquor——"

"But that ain't the point," interrupted the sheriff. "Your stillin' was the start of this trouble, but it's lost sight of now. You've killed four marshals and hurt four more, and you're up here defying all Kaintucky and the United States. Some says you've started a civil war. Others 'low that unless you're took and hung, everybody will be breakin' the law.

"But worse'n that, Finley," added Clint with feeling, "is the fact that you're shaming your own mountains!"

That was the angle of the situation that distressed Sheriff Hawkins most; everything else was secondary; and he taxed his vocabulary and quoted copiously from the papers in explaining it to the Yocums. They were astonished, impressed, actually embarrassed at moments; but Finley's pride was first of all selfish.

"I won't be took alive," he reiterated stubbornly, his black eyes kindling. "I know they'll git us purty soon now, Clint, but I won't give up tame-like. They got to kill Fightin' Finley afore they capture him."

The sheriff rose.

"Then pick your time for dying and I'll strive to accommodate you."

His own eyes glinted and looked down at the brothers from above a squared jaw.

"No fotched-on soldiers are going to draw blood out of you two," he snapped. "I'm still running this county, and that's my job. You know what happens when Clint Hawkins takes the trail."

Both Finley and Elmer did know. They might successfully defy posses of "furriners" here in their native hills, but if the burly sheriff, a fellow mountaineer, declared war against them it meant war to a brief and terrible finish. Lenient as Clint generally was in exercising his authority, when aroused he was the bitterest and most invincible of foes. No one ever had survived his enmity for long.

Elmer Yocum spoke, his receding chin quivering:

"I—I didn't want to git into this trouble, Mr. Hawkins, honest. Finley he made me. I was willin' to leave the still and go home when we heerd them fust revenuers was comin'. I've a woman and young 'uns to think of, but he ain't."

His brother got to his feet and regarded him contemptuously.

"Yas, ye coward," he sneered; "ye'd 'a' run without shootin' a shoot if I'd let ye. Ye're afeerd to stand up and fight like a Yocum."

At that moment a whistle down at the holly-bush diverted the trio's attention. Finley stepped cautiously to the edge of the ledge and peered out through a break in the trees. Clint followed him, while Elmer remained hunched over by the fire.

The wintry atmosphere was clear, and the early-morning sun revealed every detail of the wide valley below and its western flank of low hills. On those hills, just opposite Yocum Knob, the mountaineers saw the pigmy figures of uniformed men working, digging. Near them were parked several army motor trucks and two fieldpieces with their caissons, and beyond them other soldiers were setting up a row of brown tents. Down in the valley, and ready for action, four squads of machine gunners had "dug in," their positions commanding three sides of the knob.

"Finley—" the sheriff laid a heavy hand on his shoulder—"they're going to get you this time. Maybe you won't live to see another day-break. Them two cannon out yonder will just naturally shoot this hill into bird-bites, and they're counting on the soldiers coming up behind to catch you if you run that way.

"Recollect, too, that our citizens don't bear you Yocums much love. They'll plug you in a minute now if you give 'em a chance. And then there's me 'n' my men to reckon with.

"Finley, you're the same as a dead 'un right now!"

The young mountaineer slowly turned, faced the sheriff and drew himself more erect. He was still the reckless, dominant outlaw, but Clint Hawkins saw in his black eyes the dawn of other emotions.

"Boy," he resumed in a lower tone, holding his gaze, "the law ain't got real evidence on anybody except you and Elmer. I've an idee that the Skaggses helped at the still before this ruction started, but they haven't done any harm since and I'll handle them later in my own way."

Clint paused, took a note-book and an indelible pencil from his inner coat pocket, and narrowed one eye meaningly.

"You know, Finley," he said, "a dead man's written word counts for a heap in court and can't always be disputed, leastwise not in this case. Elmer there's a 'shiner and he'll have to suffer for it—but are you shore that he shot any of them marshals?"

Finley hesitated, then smiled grimly, understanding.

"Naw," he answered; "I'm sartain he didn't hurt a one of 'em. I done hit all myself, makin' him stay with me."

"Then take these, use that tree for a rest and write what I tell you."

A few minutes later, the note-book with its signed confession safely in his pocket, Sheriff Hawkins continued:

"There'll be five hundred dollars coming for Elmer. Now if he'll go back with me peaceful I'll collect that money and use it to take care of his wife and young 'uns while he's away serving his liquor sentence. I give you my word on that, Finley. You go talk with him and get him in the notion."

It took little persuasion from his brother to make the younger Yocum agree to surrender. The sheriff's proposition meant life to him, if imprisonment, with the assurance that his family would be provided for.

"All right, boys," said Clint, joining them at the camp-fire. "The next thing is for you to call Reuben and Gus up here, tell 'em to go by for Ira and for the three of 'em to hustle on home, put by their weepons and keep their mouths shut. Finley, you do the talking."

Reuben and Gus Skaggs, loyal to their blood, demurred at being sent away; but at Fightin' Finley's insistence they finally went.

Nor had they more than disappeared around the knob when a *rat-tat-tat-tat* sounded from the valley, and machine-gun bullets began to clip the underbrush a few yards below the holly-bush.

"They're chasing the 'shiners and bootleggers up to this bench," remarked Clint with dry humor, "so the big guns can kill 'em easy by the hundred."

Elmer quickly sought shelter inside the log still-house; but Finley, picking up his rifle, confronted Sheriff Hawkins beside the dying fire.

"Wal, Clint," he drawled, "I've traded in my kin fer what I 'low is their good; but I'm tellin' ye ag'in I won't be took alive."

His dark features were bloodless, but not a muscle of him quivered. He jerked his head toward the valley, grinning faintly.

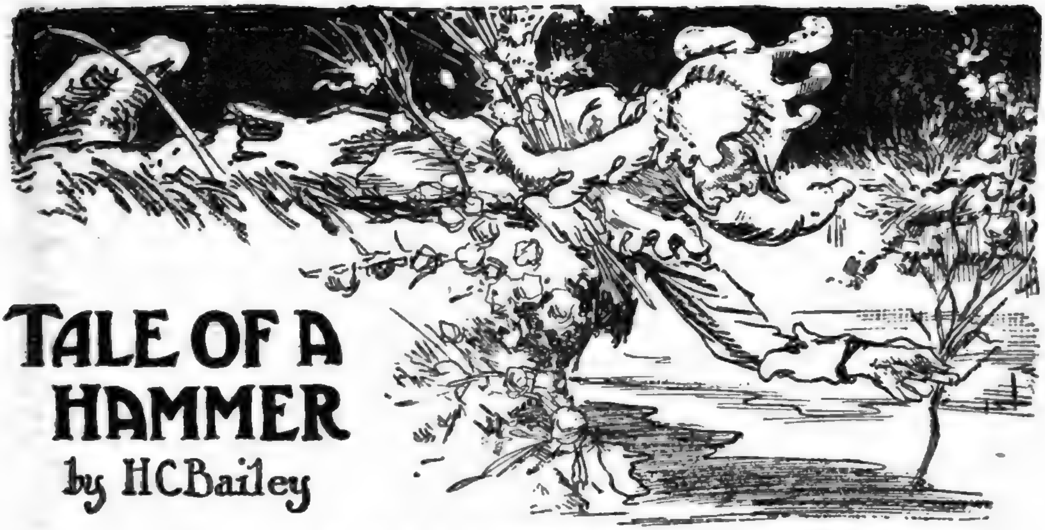
"If ye'll excuse me," he said, "reckon I'll drap down thar and l'arn what all the racket's about."

The sheriff, silent, watched him go. Through the break in the trees he saw him swing easily down the knobside, pass unscratched through the fitful rain of bullets and reach the creek.

There at the bank he paused. The machine gunners, seeing him, held their fire. But only for a moment. The mountaineer, lifting his repeater above his head, plunged into the current and started directly toward the nearest squad. There came a series of triumphant shouts from the gun nests, an answering battle yell from the creek, a *rat-tat-tat-tat* from four eager muzzles, and, his rifle still gripped tightly, Fightin' Finley Yocum staggered and crumpled up on the farther bank.

Sheriff Hawkins wiped a trembling hand across his eyes. Then he turned, squared his shoulders, strode over to the still-house door and took down his holster.

"Elmer Yocum," he ordered, "come on out of there. You're a prisoner of this county now. I'm the high sheriff, and I don't need furriners to help me enforce the law in my hills!"



TALE OF A HAMMER

by H C Bailey

Author of "The Best of the Three," "The Ambassador's Daughter," etc.

THE milkmaids were in bloom by the stream, swaying daintily as the wind swept the light dancing on the water; and the meadow was dark with bluebells, and under the beeches on the bank which bounded the great forest clusters of primroses gleamed out of the moss.

There a child was busy. On his face by the stream lay Bran the fool, so that his big head was thrust out above the stream and he looked down into the water and saw himself and he shook his cock's-comb hood and made its bells jingle and the ass's ears on it bow to him from the water.

"Oh, Bran," the child called, "it is good for us to be here."

"Now nay, quoth I, as here I lie, for I see myself when none is by and then I know that a fool am I," so he droned to himself and rolled over on his back.

"It is always best when there is none but you."

"Oh la, God keep you long of that mind. But heigho and heigho, little maids must learn to grow, and Bran the fool must go—to school——"

The child looked up.

"Bran is Bran," she said fiercely.

"Welladay, now it is May. It is good picking flowers, my flower."

"But I do not pick flowers," said the child with indignation. "Never I pick flowers. And you know it well."

"Yea, yea. A stern maid are you who fast even from flowers. What is the work then?"

"I am building," says she proudly, "a house for the fairies. Oh, Bran, there are little fairies here in this England too?"

"For certain everywhere there are fairies and some as like you as your eye to your eye and some as small as a violet's eye, and there you see them dance," and he nodded to the points of light in the rippling water.

"It is the little ones I love."

"Oh, great one!" Bran laughed. "Yea, now the fairies thrive in England, now England has peace. For without peace they will not be born."

"I love fairies," the child said. "Look Bran; look at the fairy house I have made."

Of dry twigs the walls were woven, two inches high, and there was a roof of last year's leaves and a patch of moss for the garden; and in a little hole a beechnut held water to make a well.

"A house for King Oberon. A goodly house. Yea, yea, there are many houses a-building in England now. The land bears fruit."

"Every one works in your England," the child said.

Bran looked up. The beech mast was crackling under footsteps. Through the forests a woman came in a man's arm. She was something the taller, a big creature deep-bosomed and strong, but still in the first of her womanhood. She was very fair and blue-eyed and the plaits of hair that hung over her bosom silvery yellow.

She did not look at her lover, but smiled on the world a candid, simple happiness. She wore a kirtle of blue, good honest stuff, but of the plainest.

He was in all things unlike her, dark of skin and eye and hair, slight and lithe, by much the elder, gravely earnest and with many words to her few. He was richly furnished, his green doublet embroidered and furred, a gold chain about his neck.

"Yea, yea, England is at work," Bran said.

The two lovers heard and saw him and turned back into the forest.

"She is pretty," said the child. "I think she is a princess. She has hair like cowslips."

"Welladay, now it is May," Bran droned again. "Comes October to make you sober; nought for December but to remember; welladay, what was your May?"

"That is a sad song."

The child went on building.

"I will not sing a sad song, I. They are not true."

"But fairyland is true," Bran laughed.

"That is sure," the child said.

The man came striding upon them and jumped down from the bank.

"Seigneur Bran, all hail," says he. "Walk aside with me, my lord."

Bran groaned and slowly heaved himself up.

"A young man's youth it knows no ruth," he said and looked at his man long and hard.

The man linked arms with him and drew him away.

"Do me no wrong, Bran. You have seen us. It is ill luck."

"That is ill said, Cousin Walter."

"Ill may be mended if you mean me well."

"Nenny, nenny, I am for nought. If you mean ill, you will sup on ill."

"My lady is Ursula, the daughter of Siward of the Hatch."

"And Monseigneur Walter is son of Sir Walter of Betchworth. And King Cophetua he did wed a beggar maid. But that was in the old time before, and——"

"No beggar she is, but a most fair, wise lady. And her I will wed or I will wed none. But we must be secret yet. If my father hears suddenly that I go wooing her, he will break out upon us."

"Do you mean good faith, cousin?" Bran said.

"By the holy rood."

The young man grasped his hand.

"What is her father, the Sieur Siward—cottar or villein?"

"He has a furnace here in the woods. He holds of us and of Gilbert of Ockley. He is a shrewd fellow and prospers."

"But you are born of a Norman lord and she of a Saxon churl. God be with you, cousin. England is a-making. But 'twixt hammer and anvil it goes hard with the iron."

"I fear not, nor she. But let me fight my fight fair. Tell no tales at home, Bran. Stand off and be my friend."

"Fie, fie; Bran sours no man's milk."

"Good fellow."

The young man held to him. "Good friend."

He waved his hat to the child.

"Princess la, your own true knight," and he was gone.

IN THE castle of Betchworth the king took his ease. From hunting in the royal chase by Guilford he was come to hunt the wide forest of the hills and the weald, and great sport he had. For the woodland was dense and wild, and in many miles no hamlet made a clearing and no man disturbed the coverts and there was great plenty of beasts of forest, beast of chase and beasts of warren—hart and boar, fox and roe and hare.

Also there was good entertainment indoors. For the Lady Alice of Betchworth was a merry woman and wise, and Sir Walter had seen cities and men, had worn the Cross in his youth and fought for the King of Castile in his middle age, and—what the king valued most—he was a very learned clerk.

"Of all the lands that you have ridden which likes you best, Walter?" the king said.

And Sir Walter, having talked of all Europe, praised the high woods of Surrey.

"This land that I hold is best to me," and he quoted Latin verse.

"Happy man, you," quoth the king. "And blither land I know none in my realm, who know it well. What says wise Bran, who knows more than I know?"

"All land is good to a landless man," said Bran with his mouth in a pasty. "But for me, bury me in the chalk, brother."

"Nay, man, God grant I never see your

grave. But landless! The more shame to me. You shall have a good manor to your name or the earth is a week older."

"Many a manor is in a feeble hand," said Sir Walter.

"Na, na; Bran is a snail that bears his house on his back. Bran is a dog that runs on his master's land. You are trouble enough for my life, Henry. Give me no more."

"Why, Seigneur Bran," said the lady, "but you must have hall and bower. You have a daughter to rear. She can not long wander the world with you. She will not be ever a child."

"Sooth, sooth."

Bran rolled his eyes at her.

"A wanderer and a vagabond are you, Henry, and it is no life for maids. But what home should the fool make? How should the fool give a maiden grace, Dame Alice?"

"She is a child to love," the lady said. "It is women's work, Seigneur Bran, and there are true women would do it."

"Yea, yea, everywhere good women are, but where is home? Many a home has pleased me well, but none was a home where I would dwell."

Bran counted the plumstones from his pastry.

"Pig-sty, tavern, palace, hall, convent, workshop, castle wall, where it is the best for me, there I pray my life may be, of myself I can not see, God save the good company."

He made a grotesque bow and shambled out.

"There is one who wants nothing of any man, my lord," said Sir Walter.

"A wise man, he," the king laughed.

"I dare not say that, sir," said the lady.

"Then say he wants nothing but love, fair lady. God is my life, he should not go hungry," and the king went to the work that never was long out of his mind.

Then in the afternoon came to the castle in haste Sir Gilbert of Ockley, whose lands marched with the lands of Betchworth; with but one squire and one forester he came, who followed him far off, and an angry man was he. Into the court he rode, and he cursed the grooms who would have taken his horse, and when the steward came out to him he roared for Sir Walter and sat muttering on his smoking horse.

So Sir Walter, a leisurely man, greeted him with—

"Why, Gilbert, you are in a heat."

Sir Gilbert thrust out in his face a cross-bow bolt so violently that the older man drew back.

"Nay, fear it not," Gilbert laughed. "It is your own."

Sir Walter took it and made out in the iron his stamp W. B.

"What then; has it done you a wrong?"

"I found it in a hart—a hart of ten—in my covert under the Hatch. The foul fiend burn him that shot it! Do you own the kill, Sir Walter of Betchworth?"

"By my faith, not I. No man of mine has ridden your borders. We have been busy otherwise."

Sir Gilbert laughed.

"Aye, you have oil enough on your tongue. I say he was a false knave that did it, and he is a false coward that denies it. Will you answer that with oil?"

"I shall know how to answer."

"Answer me now or I strike you down before your own grooms."

He plucked at his sword.

"And hang for it," said Sir Walter with a shrug. "Look up, man; look up!"

He pointed to the royal standard flying over his keep.

"The king is here."

Sir Gilbert stared and Sir Gilbert swore.

"The king has saved you this day," he growled. "When the king has gone look to yourself."

"I have saved your head now. I have kept my own against better men than you. Go your way," and he turned and went in, and Sir Gilbert rode off more furiously than he came.

"As old as I am I grow no wiser," Sir Walter took counsel with himself. "I should not have told the fellow I had spared him. Such an oaf is he he would not have known else. And now he will never forgive me."

And the good man was disturbed. The chance of fighting Gilbert pleased him, but to quarrel was weariness; and by the cause of the quarrel he was puzzled. Churl or outlaw might risk his head to kill deer, but that churl or outlaw should shoot with Betchworth bolts was out of reason.

One of his own men in Gilbert's coverts? They had enough to do with the King's hunting. He would not believe it, but, conferring with his chief forester and his son, found them less solemn on the matter, the forester sagely propounding that when covert marches with covert a chance is a chance and St. Hubert to speed; while young Walter laughed and bade him ask Gilbert for the haunch. But Sir Walter was precise in his notions of right, and he delivered a short homily and was troubled.

Now on the next day when the king went hunting they roused a hart beyond the river and it ran boldly; but on a sudden they came upon the hounds nosing at a beast that lay in a pool of blood.

"God bear witness!" Sir Walter cried. "Who kills the king's quarry?"

Young Walter was down by the dead hart.

"This is not yours, my lord. Your quarry was younger. This beast is a hart of ten."

"Who kills in your coverts, Walter?" the king said. "God's my life, I would I had the whipping of him," and he gnawed his fingers and glowered, for he loved his hunting. "I crave that honor, my lord," says Sir Walter.

"A shrewd shot," young Walter said and cut out the bolt.

He wiped it on the turf and looked at it.

"It is our make— No, by my faith. Gilbert of Ockley! Gibby the bold!" And loud he laughed.

"God is my witness!" Sir Walter exploded.

"What is the jest, friend?" says the king sourly.

"Why, my lord, Sir Gilbert of Ockley came raging to my father, for he had found a hart killed upon his ground by a bolt of ours; and here is a bolt of his in a hart of our covert. And each, by your leave, a hart of ten."

"He is a merry fellow, your Gilbert," the king glowered. "He needs chastening."

"I vow I never knew him merry, my lord," young Walter must still be chuckling. "Nay, this quip is too neat for him."

"An oaf, an oaf!" Sir Walter cried.

"What is it then? Your men and his harry each other's coverts? God is my life, you keep good order in your forests!"

Bran plucked at his sleeve, and he turned to see Bran scratching a bare head.

"Of the hart that fell and the hart that fled—what ails you, brother? Tell poor Bran. He is quick which should be dead, he is dead which should be quick. God have mercy, why do you rage, brother? It was ever so. Thus is the world made. No man yet slew what he fought. No man yet won what he thought. No man yet lost what he ought. And when you have made the world anew, you will not make what you think you do."

The king laughed and, "I will wear the motley then, I," he said.

But Sir Walter was still solemn.

"I can make nothing of it but that some rogues of mine and Gilbert's are set on breaking bounds. A vile thing. All will go to havoc if this be not stayed. There is ever trouble brewing when covert marches with covert."

"And cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark," the king laughed. "Nay, man, call quits now and let each man take order with his own rogues."

"I will deal roundly with mine, my lord. But I would I knew the truth of this."

"The beast is not long killed," his son said. "A bold thing, sir. It is a chance but we had marked the rogue. And by my faith if he came from Gilbert's ground there be more than we might have seen him—Siward's folk from the Hatch."

Bran blinked at him.

"It is well thought on!" his father cried. "By your leave, my lord, let the boy ride to this Siward. It is a shrewd fellow and true and loves us well. God is my witness, I would not for all I hold have shown you so ill a chase, and now I must have the right of it."

"Nay, man; nay, it is no such matter," the king said. "Order it as you will, but make no ill blood of it. And now ride on in God's name. The day is young yet."

Bran lingered by young Walter's horse.

"A shrewd fellow, Siward of the Hatch, cousin?" he grinned.

"Why, so he is."

Walter stared.

"What is in your head, Seigneur Bran?"

"And so say I, cousin," Bran laughed and rode on.

THEY killed a boar under the down, and hard by found another hart which ran so stoutly that the forest grew dark and never a shot they had; and though the hounds still held on, the horses began to fail, and Sir Walter was lost and his foresters were lost; and at last it was clear to Bran and the king, where nothing else was clear to them, that they had lost themselves.

The discovery was made in a vast splash. Bran stopped with a yell, flung himself out of the saddle and found that he was on the bank of deep water wherein were the king and his horse. The king, swearing and laughing, was already scrambling out. Bran haled him up, and together they towed the scared, weary horse some way till he found his feet and came to dry land.

"What should this ocean be, brother?" Bran said. "We are many a long mile from the river; and the river is no such matter neither, and all else in this country is but brooks. But here is deep sea."

"We have rid over the edge of the world," the king laughed. "Or this is art magic and dreams; and I am not wet, nor the water. God is my life! Look, we are in hell."

Out of the darkness a red glow shot from mid-air to the sky, not in one place but several, as from vast, hidden fires; and as they watched faint, smokeless flames rose and fell.

"Nenny, nenny, it can not be hell, for they have there no water. Or are we mad, brother? Sure that were a gruesome thing, to be mad in hell; yet it hath in a manner comfort."

"Lead on, brother," the king said. "Fire of earth or fire of hell, I will dry me my shirt."

Then, marching on the glare, they found a man with a lantern who, lifting it to look at them, revealed a face black as coal.

"Amen; so be it," Bran said. "Here is the devil."

This man answered him nothing but pointed on through the dark and turned away.

"Yea, yea; by his pride you may know him," said Bran. "The arch fiend is he."

But the king took hold of him.

"Softly, friend; what is this fire of yours?"

The man laughed.

"God save you, where was you bred? 'Tis the furnace. And there is the chafery. And yon is the finery. Aye, and yon is the finery, too."

He pointed from glare to glare.

"Gramercy, brother," Bran laughed. "Now we know all. One chafery is two fineries and two fineries make one chafery. Good news, faith."

"What is your work, fellow?" the king cried.

Again the man laughed loud.

"Iron. Strange folk, you. Iron. Iron. You know not where you be. 'Tis the Hammer of the Hatch."

"Now are we back on earth," Bran said. "One Siward dwells here, good fellow?"

"Siward is my master, and this his hammer."

"If he has a house to his back, lead on," said the king. "I drip."

He had a house. By the lantern light they made out a long, low building, mighty spacious for a common man and of stone. Their guide hammered at the door.

"Siward, Siward, here be strange folk rid into the pond."

Bolts were drawn, the door flung wide; and they stood in the light, blinking at a sturdy fellow who smiled through a yellow beard.

"Here is warmer welcome, friends. What men are you?"

"One Bran, a fool; and one Henry, a king," said Bran.

If he thought to take Siward aback, he was wrong. A keen glance scanned them, and down on one knee went Siward.

"I am Siward of the Hatch, lord, and what I have is yours and loyal, humble service. Pray you, honor me. It is a poor house, mine; but none other there is this many a mile."

"By my faith," said the king, giving his hand and looking hungrily within, "no house ever liked me better."

And indeed Siward lived at his ease. His hall was large and carpeted with fragrant herbs. Pewter was bright on his board; and he had white bread and wine, clary and piment, and a roasted crane beside the great joints of beef and pork and high pasties. There were even two good chairs.

The king, put into a linen shirt and a robe of fine wool, swore that his yeoman of the wardrobe furnished him worse. He kissed Siward's wife, Elfrida, a large, calm woman; he kissed the daughter Ursula and led Elfrida back to her chair, took Siward's, thrust Siward down on the bench at his side and vowed that neither man nor woman should lose a supper for him, and fell to.

It was a large household, large as Sir Walter's own; for below the salt sat Siward's workmen and their wives, a sturdy, jolly company, in no awe of master or king, but mannerly enough.

"God's my life," said the king, "you are like a lord in his castle, friend Siward. You make good cheer for a goodly band."

"Who work hard must live well. But no lord I," Siward laughed. "Nay, God forbid. I am but a craftsman, my lord."

"And all these make iron for you?"

"With me, for you, my lord. With iron is your realm built."

"Well said! But look you now, how little a man knows. I thought I had learnt this England of mine, but never I knew you ironmakers were waxed so great. Never I saw such a homestead as yours."

"We lie deep in the forests, my lord. We keep close to our work. And the work grows swift as England grows. My grandsire had but a smithy; and he was the first of us who was a freeman, buying his freedom. My father built him one little furnace before he died. So it began. I am not yet old; but the rest is of my own time and since you brought us peace."

"I have builded better than I knew," the king said.

Siward looked at him a moment over his wine-cup.

"Aye, my lord. So it falls with wise men."

"Yea, yea, ever in luck are the wise," said Bran; "but the fool must live by his wits."

"I see you also have builded well, Master Siward," the king said. "Many a lord keeps no such cheer as you; no, nor such power about him."

Siward looked grave.

"You mock me, my lord. We are but hammer-men all, they and I; living by our craft and knowing naught else."

The folk below the salt as they finished their supper went off without a word or bow; and Siward only and his wife and daughter were left.

"Mock you, man? Not I," the king laughed. "I could envy you. You with your fair lady and fair maid."

He beckoned to Ursula, and she came and stood beside him; and he put his arm about her, and she looked down at him as placid as her mother.

"Is it a good life here in the woods, sweetheart?"

"I am always happy, my lord."

"And would you dwell here all your days?"

"If it is to be—" she smiled a little—"it will be well."

"And no man has told your fair bosom what is to be?"

"My heart would tell me first, I think."

"And your head, too," the king laughed. "Go your ways. I fear you. Have you more, Siward, or is this fair wisdom all?"

"Two sons I have, my lord, but one watches the chafery and one is gone selling horse-shoes and nails to your steward in Guildford."

"Two fineries and one chafery. Two sons and one daughter. The man has all things to his desire," said Bran.

"I will not believe it of any man," the king laughed. "What, Siward, speak true, is there naught that you ask yet?"

"Surely, my lord," Siward smiled. "I would have another furnace. If I had fuel for it then I might serve two more fineries and another chafery."

"Now he talks Hebrew. God is my life, I must learn this craft of yours that breeds such content in men and maids. Will you make me a hammer-man, Siward?"

"Every man must be bred to his craft, my lord," Siward smiled. "Why, who comes so late?"

For some one beat on the door and shouted his name, and when he opened there stood young Walter.

"Siward, man, have any of your folk had sight— God be thanked, my lord. All our men are beating the woods for you."

In he came, red and splashed.

"You have taken no hurt, my lord?"

"I lost myself and found a pond. No hurt, no. Only a noble welcome. And by my soul, Master Siward hath had me breaking a commandment this hour past. I covet his house vilely and all that is his."

"Faith, my lord, you could have found no better fortune than Siward and Siward's good cheer. We are again in his debt, my father and I. But will you ride now? There is a good track to Betchworth."

"Young man—" the king lay back in his chair and drank and settled his arm again about Ursula—"if you had such fortune as I, would you leave it to ride the forest by night?"

"Not alone, sir," said Walter, and Ursula smiled as the men laughed. "But I break your commandment, too. Have I your leave to go, my lord? My father is in distress for you."

"Comfort him, my son. Tell him I have found consolation," the king laughed and when he was gone turned to Ursula. "That is a well-bred colt, sweetheart."

"The gentleman is a merry gentleman," said she.

And then the king though still he kept her by him talked of iron and the making of iron till Bran curled himself up by the fire like a dog and among the dogs went to sleep.

IN THE morning he was afoot betimes and out with Siward to be schooled in the work of the hammer. He saw the great, smoking mound where the raw ore was built up with layers of charcoal and burned till it fell into small pieces which could be fed into the great furnace. He saw that sandstone furnace in which the fire burned half a year and more which was fed with ore twice in a day and from which the molten metal flowed to make sows of crude iron. He saw the fineries in which the sows were put again through fire and hammered into the square masses which Siward called blooms and heated yet again to be beaten into the bars called anconies. He saw the chafery where the anconies went once more into the fire to be made longer and rounded off. He saw the water-wheel on the great pond of his ducking which drove the untiring hammers. And neither the heat nor the abounding noise troubled him or stayed the flood of his questions.

"Good faith, my lord, you will know my craft by heart," Siward smiled gravely.

"To know every man's craft, that is the craft of a king. Nay, but this is all new to me. It was in my mind that one man here and there, each with his little furnace, burned out iron and it was enough. But here you have a township and many men's work and great engines."

"It is new, my lord. Till you gave the land peace, naught was done but in a little way. And till there was peace the land had use for but little. Now we can not make enough. And so it grows."

"And there is no end to it."

"I see none in my day nor in my children's. That is your work, my lord."

"And the work breeds good men."

He clapped his hand on Siward's broad shoulder.

"Here be many men where naught was but beasts of chase and beasts of warren. So it goes, my lord. But for me, I make iron."

"Nay, God's my life, you make England," the king said. "But where does your iron go, Siward?"

"Here we fashion it in bars and spades and horse-shoes and nails and——"

"And crossbow bolts, cousin?" said Bran.

"Aye, in many things."

Siward glanced at him.

"I will show you if you please. And many anconies we sell to the smiths and the armorers."

"There is one seeking you, cousin," Bran said.

Siward turned.

"It is Sir Gilbert of Ockley," he said carelessly. "Will you see the store, my lord?"

And while Sir Gilbert talked loud to Siward's son, to the store they went. The king was still busily curious; but Bran lingered and dallied and, having found some arrow-heads, sat him down and played with them, dropping them into the floor between his feet and juggling with them. At this Siward found him and surveyed him with some contempt.

"My iron is keen, friend."

"Yea, yea. But I have my craft, too."

He had two bolts in the air at once and let them fall between the fingers of one hand behind his head and caught them in the other.

"I can shoot two at once. Is it these pretty things Sir Gilbert seeks?"

"He buys of me," Siward said carelessly.

Through the dull beat of the hammers men's voices were raising loud. He strode to the door.

The king swung Bran around.

"What is in your head now?" he whispered.

"He is a deep man, he."

"And honest, I will warrant him."

"Who had the bolts that slew the deer? Honest Siward stores them here."

"He rob the forest! Not he."

"Sooth, sooth. Where the harts fell, there they lay; he came not to steal who came to slay."

"Why then in God's name? What use

to Siward? You are too wise, Brother Bran. He is no wild rogue, no man less."

"Nay; he is a deep man, he. Where is he, brother?"

"God's my life, the man is gone!" the king cried and went to the door.

Away before the house Sir Gilbert and Sir Walter were horse to horse and loud in a quarrel.

"Nay, faith, this asks for me, I think," the king laughed and was going; but Bran stayed him.

"Look and listen and learn, brother. The Sieur Siward hath this in his hand."

Neither gentleman indeed, to do them justice, had come with the thought of quarreling or with any sinister intent. Sir Gilbert was there, even as Bran opined, with the single purpose of buying crossbow bolts. Sir Walter to recover his king; and neither expected to meet the other.

The shock of meeting was the more violent. Sir Gilbert exploded in a gibe about Sir Walter's wondrous courage in daring to leave his castle. Sir Walter with the outrage on his own coverts and the king's spoiled hunt still heating him boiled over. Sir Gilbert found himself accused of that very wrong whereof he complained and, having with difficulty understood the charge, was beside himself. So they were rating each other, jostling each other horse to horse; hands were at sword-hilts when Siward came.

"My good lords, you do me wrong," he said and took their horses' heads. "You have honored me much. Do me no dishonor now, I pray you."

"Stand off, man!" Sir Gilbert cried. "You have naught to do here."

"I am a poor man to you, my lord, and hold but little; yet what I hold is mine and who does violence here on my land puts me to shame. But I pray you, what wrong has fallen here to inflame you? Tell me and I will answer for it."

"God save you, Siward—" Sir Walter gave an angry laugh—"it is no fault in you or yours."

"Yet here you take swords. You who are great lords and my very good masters. Do me reason, my lords, what is left of me, if you fight upon my land. I am the earthen pot that is crushed between two iron caldrons," and, standing there between their two horses, he looked mildly from one angry man to the other.

Sir Gilbert was compelled to laugh.

"The poor Siward! He hears his ribs crack. A wise fellow."

"Please you, my lord, this is no jest to me. You have known me both and known me true, I hope. And I have done you both honest service. But if there is feud between you there is an end of me. If the castles are at war I must pack and go!"

The two knights looked at each other; and each bethought him of the good iron which the Hammer furnished him, of the good marks in the year which the Hammer stood for on the manor roll.

"Sooth it is—" Siward shook his head sadly—"of both I hold, and betwixt both I lie; and if one is against other I am destroyed. You know it well, my lords."

They did know it and pondered and then:

"Betwixt both you be!" Sir Gilbert cried. "A true word! And an honest man are you. Tell me true then, and you, Walter, hear him, have you seen Sir Walter's men come to kill on my land?"

"I? My lord, not I."

Siward was duly aghast.

"No, nor Gilbert's men come killing here," Sir Walter said. "But so it is. A hart of ten with one of Gilbert's arrows in it across the king's chase."

"And a hart of ten, deep in my coverts, killed by a bolt of yours two days since. You struck first."

"God's death, do you own the shot then?"

"My lords, my lords!"

Siward spread out his hands between them.

"More wrong will not make wrong right. Nay, who will believe that either did other wrong? I have seen nought, not I. But I hold little land, and far beyond my holding your coverts march. That is the evil. Men mark not where they ride nor where they shoot. Honestly unknowing, or knowing but in the heat of the chase, your foresters cross their own bounds or the stricken beast runs on and dies far from the bowman. So it must be while your coverts march."

"Here is good comfort!" quoth Gilbert. "What, must I build me a wall about my land because there are cursed bad woodmen beyond?"

"Look to your own, Gilbert," Sir Walter said.

"Nay, my lords, there is naught in this for ill blood. By St. Mary, I could promise you peace if I dared."

"Speak out, wise man," Sir Walter said.

"I have ventured before, and you liked it not. Aye, and with you too, my lord. Yet it is a little thing and will bear you good silver in the year. Set apart land, each but a strip, and there's a clear bound betwixt your coverts; and give it me to my holding, and I will fence it and burn it for charcoal. Nor beast nor man will cross them, and you shall have profit of it beside."

The two knights looked at each other.

"How now?" said Sir Walter. "He talked of this before, and I would not hear. But I never knew that he asked your land too."

"I would not give it," says Sir Gilbert. "No more than you. But faith, I knew not that he had asked yours," and he began to laugh.

Siward smiled discreetly.

"Proud lords you are and stubborn. It is well seen this day. Why should I tell either that the other had denied me? That helps not me. Good faith, my lord, it is true I want the land, for I need more fuel to the Hammer. But true it is also that it serves you well to grant the land, which before you would in nowise believe. Call friends, my lords, and mark off your bounds."

Then away in the storehouse:

"God's my life," said the king, "here was the mark for his bolts, Brother Bran. A cunning craftsman, he. And I—I toil and sweat to make my barons do the realm service, and here is this smith and his smithy orders them at his will."

"Yea, yea, the craftsman's need is the land's good speed," said Bran.

The two knights were reckoning up the matter and each other between long looks, something shamefaced; and each waited for the other to speak.

"How say you, Walter?" cried Sir Gilbert at last.

And Sir Walter, the wiser man, put his pride away.

"Let us give him his land, Gilbert," he said with a good grace enough. "He is right. We shall establish our peace so. It must be done together. What one grants let the other grant."

"You have said."

Gilbert was satisfied if the other was first to yield.

"Be it so. What! Who comes here?"

URSULA came and young Walter; and between them, holding a hand of each, was the child Ia.

"But where is Bran?" she was pleading. "You have not found me Bran."

"Ursula and young Walter! And very tenderly withal." Gilbert laughed loud.

"Goodman and goodwife, faith. What, are they wed already and a child to their house? Give you joy, Grandsire Walter."

"Here is a scullion's jest."

Sir Walter flushed.

"It is the child of the king's fool."

And young Walter forsook his lady and the child and strode forward.

"Do you mock at me, my lord? Then come apart with me and you shall be answered."

"Oh no, no, no. I praise you, young sir. A good eye you have for a woman and well-matched you are. And——"

"I would have no man jest with my daughter's fame, my lord," Siward struck in. "I can not tell why you should mean me ill."

"Ill, good faith, not I," Gilbert laughed. "I say she is very worthy of him."

"Then you say well, my lord," said young Walter fiercely and turned to his father. "My most dear lord, this you should have heard of me alone. But since this gallant knight would make evil of it I must speak now for her honor and mine. I am this lady's true servant forever, and I seek her to wife."

"Siward's daughter?" his father cried.

"This is no more of my seeking than of yours, my lord," said Siward. "Be sure that I crave nothing of any man for my daughter."

Then the child said, "Why are they all angry, Ursula?" and stroked her timidly.

And in the storehouse:

"Alack, the wise Siward," the king laughed. "A woman has undone all his wit. The man is but a man after all. Shall I strike in, brother?"

"Peace, peace. They want none but a fool," said Bran and slouched out.

The child saw him and cried out and ran to him.

"Bran, Bran, they are all angry, and she is sad," she said and clung to his arm that was about her.

"Nenny, nenny, they play a game that big folks play," Bran said. "An old, old game."

But when the child had left her Ursula came forward and took young Walter's hand, and she looked up calmly at his father.

"Good morrow, wise folks," Bran said. "Do you lack a fool?"

"God's body!" Sir Walter cried. "Do you brave me, girl?"

"I stand here because I must, my lord," she said.

"And by St. Paul, a gallant wench!" Gilbert laughed.

"And so I stand, my father," young Walter said. "Do us right."

"Free man and free maid, naught to them is gainsaid," Bran droned.

"Aye, the fool is your right friend. You are mad, boy."

"Today to you, whatever the sorrow, read you true, theirs is tomorrow."

"God is my witness, must I have a fool's jangle? Speak out, Siward. There is naught in this but folly and shame. You know it well."

"I know not that, my lord," Siward said. "It is no more my work than yours; but I can not bind what is free."

"Then go your ways, you and your girl; I will have none of it."

"You are my lord, and I hold of you. But if you break with me I go. What I have done here I can do on the other land."

"Wherever I go this maid is mine, my lord," young Walter said.

Bran counted on his fingers and muttered to himself and sang—

"Four men be here and four wise men and a maid withal I see; but who of them all is most worth to all is dark to a fool like me."

Then Sir Gilbert, whose mind, no bright one, was very sure of the use of the Hammer and its rents, cried out—

"What, Siward, would you quit and go?"

"I hold of no lord who bears me ill."

"Now God have mercy, Walter, we must not lose him."

"Aye, my good friend are you!"

"What wrong is done, sir?" young Walter cried. "Here is honest blood and true and the fairest lady in the shire and wise; and my heart is for her and my soul."

"I am a lonely man this day," Sir Walter said heavily.

"That shall not be, my lord. Oh, trust me."

"You are my son."

He held out his hand. "I would have nor you nor her forget that."

The young man took the hand and kissed it and offered it for Ursula to kiss.

"Peace be with you."

It was the king called to them; the king came with his brisk, rolling gait.

"God save the good company." Hats came off embarrassed heads.

"Nay, never heed me. You have no need of me. I am come but to kiss the bride."

And heartily he did so.

"Never grudge me, lad."

He gave her back to Walter.

"God's my life, wise men are you all, but the young one is wisest."

He put his hands, one on Walter's shoulder, one on Ursula's.

"Aye, faith, here is my England. Make her men such as your fathers."

And he came back to old Sir Walter.

"Give me your sword, old friend. Kneel, Siward. Bend your stiff knee. Aye, that is hard. Now rise, Sir Siward."

"I am your man, my lord. How shall I thank you? You have made what I never thought to be."

"You have made yourself, man."

"Give you joy, sir knight." Gilbert laughed.

Sir Walter put out his hand.

"Let us hold together, Siward. I promise you, I fear you."

So they went in to drink wine on it, and the king plucked Siward apart.

"Shall I blazon you a coat of arms, Sir Siward? I will give you two crossbow bolts gules upon vert. Oh, rogue!"

Siward smiled in his beard.

"And two knights enraged proper. Nay, good my lord, a beggar on horseback should be my crest. But you are too wise for me. I pray you keep my secret. What is a man to do when men will not see their own good?"

"Nay, faith, that is ever the king's riddle. But I did not guess your secret, wise man. It was my fool."

"I owe him the more, my lord, who kept a still tongue. And he was the wise man when all went awry."

"Where is he, my Bran?"

The king looked around.

Bran was away by Siward's wife, and

she had the child on her knee. "Aye, that is Elfrida," Siward smiled. "She never passed by one that is lonely or little or weak."

"Well the child knows that; see!"

For Ia was nestling to the deep bosom.

Siward went to them.

"Welcome, little one."

"This is a kind house," Ia said, watching him with big eyes. "And you were not angry, you. Not very angry."

Siward put his hand on Bran's shoulder.

"Will you come to my house sometimes, little maid?"

The child looked up into his wife's face.

"Please come," Dame Elfrida said.

Bran turned.

"You see clear, you. I am a homeless man."

"I am in your debt, friend. Here is home at your need."

"I am Bran's one," the child cried out.

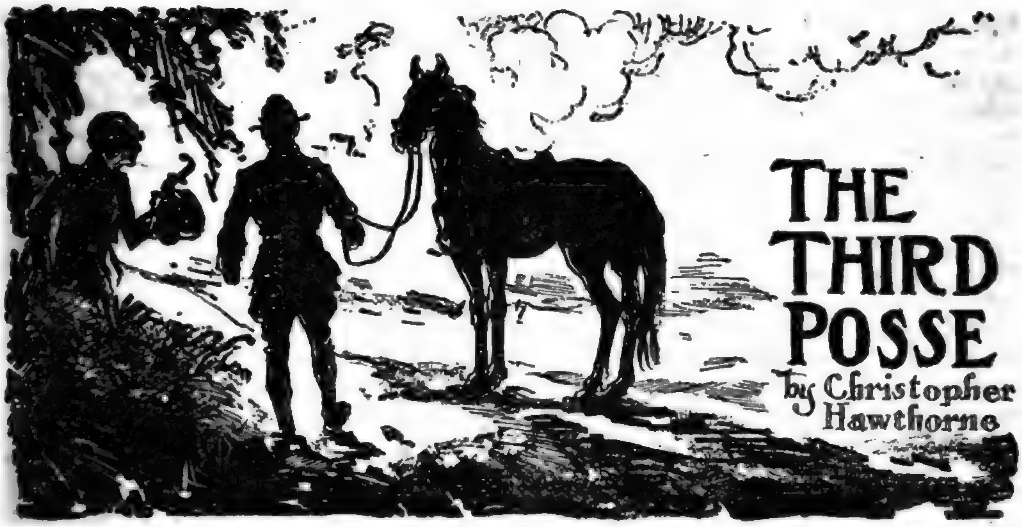
"Yea, always Bran's one—" Dame Elfrida kissed her—"and here is home for Bran's one and Bran."

"What is home?" the child said.

"You shall know. Be very sure you shall know," said Siward. "You and he," and he gave his hand.

But afterward when the king and his fool rode alone:

"Brother Bran, Brother Bran, what need have I to be king of this people of mine? They do their own work. They are grown."



THE THIRD POSSE

by Christopher Hawthorne

IT WAS only a few days after John Stringer, the reform mayor of Buried Ace, had gone around personally and confiscated all the firearms in town that two men walked into the bank and walked out again with forty thousand dollars. As a measure of precaution against pursuit they took with them the thirty or more revolvers, automatics and sawed-off shotguns that the mayor, in his zeal for public safety, had gathered up and put in his desk at the bank.

The method employed by the robbers marked them either as a pair of simple-minded hicks or as gifted criminals—the bare facts warranting either conclusion. Technically, it was not a hold-up, since the men made no use or display of weapons. It was in a shabby Ford sedan that they arrived in town. Jumping out at the general store, they bought an empty soap-box and a piece of rope about six feet long. With these frugal purchases they entered the bank.

Nellie Ryan, the cashier—an extremely pretty widow—was alone behind the wire cage. Mayor Stringer sat at his desk near the window in a corner outside, a saloon screen appropriated in a raid serving as a partition for his office. The rest of the male population was attending an auction sale of oil lands in a shack about two hundred yards down the road. In anticipation of a general settlement Nellie had done up all the currency into neat packages of bills and stacked them on a counter a safe distance from the window.

The two men stepped briskly up to the cage. One of them slipped the rope through the wire netting and tied the door from the outside. The other stood up on the soapbox, reached over the top of the roofless cage and plucked the forty or more packages of mixed currency from the counter.

The cashier screamed and began to pull at the door. The mayor turned in his swivel chair, kicked over the screen and saw what was going on. Opening the bottom drawer of his desk, he reached for a sawed-off shotgun that lay on top of the pile. One of the robbers walked over and fetched him a terrific lick on the jaw with his fist, knocking him out cold. The other picked up a newspaper from the desk and wrapped the currency in it. Then they pulled out the drawer containing the firearms and toted it toward the door, first dropping the money on top. On the way out a few packages fell from the loose bundle to the floor.

Nellie tugged at the door, laughing hysterically at the audacity of the proceedings.

"Here, you men," she cried, "take this shawl-strap. You're losing the money out of that bundle!"

The robbers gratefully accepted the strap which she threw over the top of the cage. One of them dropped to his knees and quickly made a tidy and portable roll of the loot. A moment later the two were outside the bank, inside the Ford and headed across Musk Ox Range toward Tree Line Post, sixty miles away—the nearest inhabited point north of Buried Ace. For all this had happened in the great Canadian province of Saskatchewan, a territory of magnificent and desolate distances.

With the robbers gone and the mayor lying unconscious on the floor Nellie scaled the top of the cage in abandoned boy fashion. First she ran to the door, seized a hammer and hit the big steel triangle that served as a fire and burglar alarm for Buried Ace. With the first resonant clang a half-dozen sturdy men popped out of the auction shack and raced toward the bank.

The cashier was pouring a pail of water over the mayor's face when the vanguard burst through the door. She told them what had happened and gave a description of the robbers—an idle waste of time, since it fitted half the men she was addressing quite as well. They were the regular north country type—young, tall, lean, leather-faced and hickory-shirted. One of them wore a celluloid collar and looked as if he might have been a Calgary gambler.

By this time the mayor showed signs of returning consciousness.

"When this fellow comes to, we'll hang him," announced Ben Cushing, who had been swept out of the mayoralty by the reform wave.

"You will like ——!" roared Stringer, reviving with suspicious suddenness and jumping to his feet.

"Boys, this is an inside job," snarled Ben. "Stringer took all our guns away and then brought these guys up from Saskatoon or somewhere to get the sugar. Picked out a nice time, didn't he? Here we were all at the auction and Nellie had the money out for a settlement. What good is it going to do to chase these fellows without our guns?"

"Looks like you smelled a mouse, all right," muttered one of the prospectors, glaring accusingly at the mayor.

"Smelled a mouse!" howled Cushing. "Why man, it smells like a wet mule in July!"

"Pegleg" Jones began to tug viciously at the rope on the cage door. The mayor backed against the wall, rubbing his chin.

"That rope ain't long enough for hangin' people," he said drily. "Besides, lynching was never popular in Canada. I want to warn you men from the States—it ain't necessary to talk to the Canadians—that if you hang me, every man who lays a hand to the rope is bound to swing. Yes, sir, swing—and the job will be done in the name of King George, God bless his Majesty."

But there had been little real enthusiasm over the project of hanging the mayor. Cushing was a blustering old-timer and his threat was regarded as a characteristic gesture.

The true keynote was sounded by Mrs. Ryan.

"Shut off the hot air, Ben," she advised, "John Stringer didn't have anything to do with this robbery. Five thousand of his own money was in that bundle."

"That's right," supplemented Stringer, "we might as well get busy and head these fellows off—I'll call up Tree Line Camp."

"That shows what a boob you are," snarled Ben. "There ain't no telephone out of this place to the north. The only wire we've got is back to the railroad spur and that's ten miles in the other direction. When I was mayor I established an official kitty to raise money for a wire across the range. Then because two mutts got killed in the poker game you had to go startin' a ballyhoo against gamblin'."

"Ancient history," growled the mayor. "That happened four months ago."

"Taking our guns away ain't ancient history," interjected Pegleg Jones. "Puttin' them in a drawer where they'd be nice and handy for somebody's pals," he added significantly.

"Just because two mutts got killed in a poker game," repeated Cushing morosely.

"Look here, Ben," snapped Nellie Ryan, "don't call those men mutts—least one of 'em. Mike Ryan was my husband, and he wasn't a stuffed shirt, like some people I know."

Since the widow's flashing black eyes were concentrated solely upon Ben, none of the others felt called upon to defend himself against the imputation of being a stuffed shirt.

"Another thing," she continued, "the money is safe. I gave them a shawl-strap so they wouldn't scatter it around in the excitement when you boys nail 'em."

"You giv' 'em a shawl-strap!" bawled Ben. "Nellie Ryan, were you in on this job, too?"

"It was you who nominated her for cashier of the bank," remarked Stringer with a grin.

"Well, she kept the kitty straight enough when we ran the game," growled Cushing.

Ben heard no echoing note of suspicion directed toward Nellie. The candor of her explanation—that she didn't want the robbers to scatter the money around before they were caught—brought out nothing more than an approving chuckle. He dropped into the chair he once had occupied as mayor and jabbed savagely at the telephone hook.

"I'll call up Derrigan," he said sulkily.

Derrigan! Things immediately began to look brighter. He was the single mounted man assigned to the newly broken territory of which Buried Ace was the center. When the "reform administration" was installed he had moved his headquarters back to the head of the railroad spur where he could command three trails instead of one.

"Better let Nellie call him," advised Stringer. "He'll come tearing up like a bull moose then."

"I won't call Derry," said the widow, blushing and stamping her foot.

"Guess you won't call Derry," snorted Cushing mockingly. "I can't get a rise out of The Spur—these bums must have cut the wire."

ISOLATED from the outside world, despoiled of their money and rendered helpless by the loss of their weapons, the men of Buried Ace were put on their mettle. Although the town was yet too young for baptism in the post office guide its career of juvenile delinquency had taught it to be resourceful. From the first outcropping of oil, things had been in the saddle. Buried Ace began making history every morning after breakfast, and what happened yesterday was regarded as mellowed folk lore. Events moved so fast that the inhabitants took them much as they would a moving-picture show—in one eye and out the other.

Ben Cushing had hardly made the doleful announcement that the wire had been cut before three men were in their flivvers and headed back for The Spur to pick up Derrigan and get a fresh supply of weapons. As a matter of fact not half the crowd that originally reached the bank had remained there after hearing the account of the robbery. A dozen men had been scurrying around for automobiles, horses and mules and were now assembling as a posse to begin the chase across the range.

The men knew the terrain over which the bandits were traveling. They figured that the fugitives would become stalled somewhere near Goose Neck Lake, about ten miles out. The great northern desert was still soft with the melting snows of Spring, besides being full of holes and tough scrub that made it difficult to negotiate even in the late Fall when it was dry and hard. Once out of the machine the fugitives, although armed, would be unable to withstand a mass play from men as desperate and fearless as themselves.

The posse was starting across the range when one of the men who had started for The Spur came zipping back with a cheerful yell—

"Derry is coming!"

Evidently he had been on his way to Buried Ace when the robbery occurred. The mounted man was moving up the road at a smart lope, convoyed by the two other flivvers that had started out for him.

"What's the excitement?" he demanded with an easy air of authority. But he became decidedly less crisp when his eyes fell upon the widow. "How do you do, Nell—Mrs. Ryan?" he stammered bashfully.

The widow colored, and Mayor Stringer winked at the crowd.

"We've been cleaned out," she said, quickly repeating the story of the robbery.

"Cheer up!" cried Derrigan. "We'll get these fellows without any trouble. I know 'em both—at least they stopped at The Spur early this morning for gas. Said they were coming here to get a claim. Jim Link was there at the time—seems you fellows ran him out of town last night. I let him stay at the shack so he could get a lift farther south in the morning. He got talking to the strangers and probably gave them the lay of the land by way of getting hunk with the Ace. I didn't like the looks of 'em so I took their guns away before they started for the Ace. They made a terrible holler but a lot of good it did 'em. About ten minutes after they started Jim Link disappeared without waiting for a lift. Then I got suspicious and tried to call up Stringer; but they must have cut the wire."

The mounted man paused and looked at the widow.

"Anyway," he added slowly, "I was coming over today—on other business."

Whatever message this carried to Nellie, she tried to look unconcerned and the men were too impatient for action to inquire.

"Got their guns with you?" asked Ben Cushing eagerly.

"Sure," answered the mounted man, producing a pair of big automatics from his bag.

Ben appropriated one of them, and Derrigan, by way of observing official etiquette, tossed the other to Mayor Stringer.

"Guess we're ready to start now!" he called, surveying the scattered posse with a satisfied smile.

As the entire male population of Buried Ace seemed to be in his wake at the end of the first hundred yards Derrigan turned in his saddle and pulled up.

"Some of you boys'll have to stay behind!" he yelled. "What if these birds double on their trail and come back here?"

He waved his hand in the direction of a group of women assembled in front of the bank.

"Let 'em come!" shouted one of the women wrathfully. "We'll give 'em a warm welcome with these."

She pointed to a pile of Ford parts stacked in front of the general store.

But Derrigan had fixed his eye on Pegleg Jones. That grim gentleman had returned from France three-quarters of a man physically but a fighting host in his spirit. Pegleg could shoot the eye out of a chicken at twenty yards, and once he had spun around on his peg and killed a circling pack of coyotes. The mounted man tossed his own pistol to Jones.

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay behind and chaperone the ladies," he said. "I've given you a mighty good gun there. This baby'll do for me." Derrigan tapped his rifle.

Jones accepted the pistol sulkily enough and crawled out of his flivver, his wooden stump sinking to the hilt in the mud.

The posse was straggling across the range when Mrs. Ryan fell in behind, mounted on her red saddle-mule. This unhandsome animal constituted the entire estate left by her husband, his last earthly investment having been made in white chips.

The widow had ridden out several miles before Derrigan noticed her. Then he pulled up and waited.

"Nellie," he remonstrated, "it won't do for you to come along. Lord knows how long we'll be out here."

"Do you want me to turn back?" she demanded, pulling up the mule.

"I do, Nellie," he said firmly, "but not this minute." He had grasped the bridle of her mount as she attempted to wheel. "You remember what day this is, don't you?"

"It's Thursday," answered the widow innocently.

"It's just exactly four months since Mike was—since your husband died," corrected Derrigan. "You told me not to open my mouth until——"

A great cheer rose from the men who had gone ahead. The widow and her escort screened their eyes from the sun and gazed across the bleak plain. A few hundred yards ahead they saw a black object looming against the horizon. It was the car in which the fugitives had started from Buried Ace. They had driven it almost to the edge of Goose Neck Lake, probably in the hope of finding better going on the sand. Instead, however, one side of the machine had sunk to the hubs in a pool of slush-ice, the wheels on the far side standing out on a hummock and tipping it at an acute angle in the direction from which the posse was approaching.

DERRIGAN galloped on ahead, his horse sinking almost knee-deep as he rode through the pool to the side of the machine. Jerking open the door, he peered inside. Then, turning to the posse which had paused about fifty feet back to avoid being stalled, he called—

"They've left the guns behind but not the dough!"

Two men in rubber boots leaped from one of the machines and hauled out the drawer containing the weapons. The pins and other parts had been left intact but all were unloaded.

Mayor Stringer gave a whoop and held up a nose-bag.

"I brought the cartridges along!" he shouted in triumph. "Now you fellows can have your guns back again. Load up—I'm off the reform stuff for good."

"Your own gun ain't there," said Ben Cushing suspiciously.

"No," admitted Stringer. "It was the only one I left loaded—they probably took it with 'em."

"If anybody in this outfit gets killed, it will be with your gun," sneered Ben.

"Nothin' but bird-shot in it," mumbled the mayor.

The rest of the posse picked out their weapons and loaded, venting their satisfaction by sending a fusilade through the top of the stalled sedan.

Derrigan, in the meantime, had been circling around, trying to pick up the trail of the fugitives. "Thought they were smart," he snorted, "made a half dozen leads away from the car—all blind. Anyway, it doesn't matter. You fellows who have live mounts can push on toward Tree Line Post if you like. There's a chance of getting these men before dark—a bare chance. Those in the machines will have to go back to the Ace—the going out here will get worse from now on."

"What are you going to do?" asked Stringer in surprize.

"Me? I'm going to stick around here until they come back."

Stringer glared first at Derrigan and then at the widow. The rest of the posse exchanged glances.

"Oh, I see," muttered the mayor angrily, "you've got more pressin' business on hand."

"Mrs. Ryan is going to return with the men in the machines," said the mounted man coldly. "I'm going to stay right here—or at least in this neighborhood. These young gents who have your money will walk in a circle. It may take 'em twelve or fifteen hours but they're bound to come back. I've done it myself before I got prairie-wise—right here on this range at that."

The men in the posse looked at one another in amazement. Most of them had heard of this phenomonon before but, not being seasoned plainsmen, had accepted it with more or less skepticism.

"Stay here if you like!" snapped Stringer. "We're going to follow these men across the range. They're afoot, and we're mounted. Horses don't walk in a circle, and if we don't get 'em before dark, we'll at least reach Tree Line Camp first and head them off. It's the only place they can go. Lac la Rouge bars them on one side and Red Deer Swamp on the other. They're in a pocket."

Even the widow was now looking at Derrigan with dubious eyes.

"How do you make out that the men will walk in a circle?" she demanded.

"A man takes a longer stride with his right leg than with his left," explained Derrigan. "When there's no trail to follow and nothing to guide a traveler in an open country, he'll naturally walk in a circle. I've done it myself when I was a reindeer-herder. I guess some of you remember that I'm the man who brought musk ox down here from the Arctic—what?"

Everybody laughed at this. Steffansson, the explorer, had tried the experiment of acclimating musk ox as well as reindeer, to more southerly latitudes. Although the range afforded much better feeding-grounds than the frozen northern plains, the musk ox didn't know when they were well off—

they simply trekked back home, leaving nothing behind but the name. One of the Indians with the herd happened to remark that the beasts didn't like the taste of oil and so came the discovery that brought the rush of prospectors.

While Derrigan was explaining the theory of unconscious circumambulation—of course, he didn't call it that—Mayor Stringer had been rubbing his chin thoughtfully as if trying to locate the exact spot where one of the robbers had hit him. A chuckle he sought to suppress gained egress in the form of a mild salivatory explosion. Then, mindless of the hostile front that Ben Cushing had maintained toward him, he slapped his rival violently on the back, sending forth in the meantime an unrestrained howl of laughter.

"Let us all in on the vodeveel, John," urged Derrigan. "You ain't the only man here that knows a joke."

"I'm the only man that knows this one," retorted Stringer. "They'll walk in a circle, hey?" Again the mayor gave himself up to uncontrolled risibility. The widow's red mule, stirred to emulation, also sent forth a sonorous bray.

Mayor Stringer finally brought himself under control to the extent of a fixed grin.

"Come on, boys," he said, "these nags have been across the range before, and if we let 'em have their heads they'll make straight for Tree Line Camp. Horses, "he repeated," don't walk in a circle."

The men were impatient to be off—in fact, many of them had already started. Nevertheless, curiosity impelled them to pull up about a hundred yards away and listen to Stringer's great joke on Derrigan. It must have been a good one for again the widow's mule joined in the rollicking roar that was carried back on the wind.

"It's about us," conjectured Derrigan, looking sheepishly at his companion.

"Maybe," assented the widow, "but Stringer didn't begin to laugh until you said the men would walk in a circle." She looked at the mounted man with a trace of vexation on her face. "If this chase doesn't turn out as you expect, they'll run you out of the country the same as they did Jim Link."

Link had been Derrigan's predecessor on the mounted police, but had devoted so much of his time to poker and bootlegging that the provincial authorities finally dropped him. His downward course had been swift after that, ending in his ignominious ejectment from Buried Ace. But Derrigan was not of that breed. Nor was he of the Mike Ryan type.

The widow looked into his serenely confident face and clear eye; then, with a sudden impulse, she said—

"I'm going back to The Ace, Derry, but first I'll have a talk with Stringer and these men who lost the money."

She wheeled on the mule and in a few minutes the mounted man saw her halt the posse far out on the plain. Then he rode leisurely around the bend of the lake and paused on the far side, a mile across from the point where the fugitives had abandoned their Ford.

* * *

FIVE minutes after the last of the pursuers had disappeared, a neat bundle, carefully done up in a shawl-strap, was tossed to the roof of the sedan and an instant later two men scrambled to the top. From this point of vantage they cleared the pool at a jump, landing on a hummock without so much as wetting their feet.

The one who had knocked out Mayor Stringer with a punch on the jaw uttered a doleful "Whew!" and sat on the package containing the forty thousand dollars.

"Jock," he asked, addressing his companion, "did you ever hear of a man's hair turnin' white overnight? Look at mine, will you? I think I've clipped about ten hours off that record."

"It ain't your hair that's turned white, Henry, it's your liver," responded Jock.

"Say," snorted Henry, "you didn't get nicked when those suckers pumped their automatics through that Rolls Royce of ours. Look here!"

He jerked off his hat and pointed to a faint ruby streak that showed through his thin hair.

Jock drew out his "makin's" and rolled a cigaret.

"Henry," he said amiably, "we've stuck together like a pair of cockroaches on the side of that machine for an hour and conversation has been somewhat difficult. Now I don't mind telling you why we stayed here. Maybe I can get an idea through that slate roof of yours."

"What was the grand idea?" demanded Henry.

"They'll never catch up to us if we follow 'em, will they?"

Jock paused to permit this to seep through the slate roof. Then he continued:

"Tree Line Camp is a good fifty miles from here, and there's no trail. The horses and mules'll take the posse there, but we'd have got lost. Now, all we've got to do is saunter along behind 'em—they'll leave a trail like a herd of buffalo. About four miles from Tree Line we'll come to the burnt pine that Jim Link told us about. Then we'll quit followin' the posse and cut across to Lac la Rouge, pick up the grub cache and the canoe, paddle across to the Hudson Bay post——"

"And wait for Jim Link," interjected Henry.

Jock looked at his pal in pained surprize.

"Wait for Jim Link?" he echoed. "Why, man, you don't think I was on the level when I promised that loafer to divide with him, do you? He's nothing but a low bootlegger. We were obliged to associate with him in this little enterprise until the kale was in our posession, but——"

He paused and placed Mayor Stringer's shotgun out of Henry's reach.

"If you insist," he continued, observing that his companion did not approve of the double cross, "we'll leave fifty dollars for Jim at the cache. He's a drinking man, you know, and I fear that a larger sum would do him no good."

Henry rubbed a faint abrasion on his left hand just over the knuckles, made when he hit Mayor Stringer on the jaw.

"Oh, we'll make it a hundred," said Jock hastily. "Let's start."

Across the broad, irregular areas of pie-crust ice, honeycombed by the warm Spring sun, the posse had left a trail that might easily have been followed even on a fairly clear night. So inviting and alluring did it seem that it led Jock into his first strategic blunder. From their hiding-place behind the car they had not heard Derrigan's confident prediction that the fugitives would walk in a circle. Nor did they notice the single trail left by the mounted man in riding around to the other side of the lake. Derrigan, of course, had assumed that the bandits, on their return, would reach the opposite shore, since the neck thrust itself about a mile within the circumference of the circle.

"I'd give a lot to know what they were laughin' about," said Henry uneasily as the pair moved across the range.

Here again Jock's acute mind was at fault. He attached no significance to the outburst of merriment except that the men found some childish satisfaction in having riddled the sedan with bullets. Another thing which Jock failed to include in his reckoning was a possible storm—rain or snow that might obliterate the trail.

"It was nice of that gal to give us the shawl-strap," remarked Henry sentimentally. He shifted the loot from one hand to the other. "If I knew there were such women in the world I'd never have become a crook—not that I'm such a dirty hound as you are, Jock."

"Oh, I'm grateful enough," replied Jock. "I appreciate the kindness of that gent in the bank for leaving shells in this."

He tapped the shotgun and glared at his pal.

Henry, who had been walking along a bit ahead of his companion—due to the latter's insistence—again looked longingly at his skinned fist. He had begun to wonder what would happen after they reached the burnt pine. Jock would have no further need of him then. When Jim Link was in the mounted service he once had found the pair freezing and starving. He had given them food, shelter and whisky. The present foray—the most profitable they had ever made—would have been impossible without Jim Link's aid. And now the ingrate Jock was ready to ditch him with a grudging fifty or one hundred dollars!

An idea at last began to percolate through Henry's slate roof. But also, something had begun to fall upon it.

"——! It's raining!"

The exclamation came quaking from Jock's lips.

FAR back on the lonely plain, near the shore of Goose Neck Lake, Derrigan fitted oilskins over his faithful horse. Then, under rubber hood and cape, he squatted down to await the coming of night—and the fugitives.

BEN CUSHING was the only man in the posse who had not laughed at Stringer's joke on Derrigan. The mayor had explained it to him time and time again—up, down and across, as well as radially from the center—without drawing the shadow of a smile. It had just begun to rain when Ben drew up alongside his rival.

"John," he remarked, "you say that the man who knocked you out did it with his left fist. You argue from that, and maybe you're right, that one of these fellows was left-sided. If one of 'em was left-sided he'd take a longer stride with his left foot. If one of 'em took a longer stride with his right and the other with his left, of course they'd make a stand-off, and instead of walkin' in a circle, they'd walk in a straight line. Is that your dope?"

The mayor nodded wearily. He had grown tired of Ben's stupidity.

"In that case, John, I guess I'll wait until tomorrow for my laugh," said Ben. "Remember, you told Nellie Ryan that you'd give your own five thousand as a reward to anybody outside the posse who caught the robbers."

BURIED ACE went to bed that night broke, cold, wet and desolate. In the window of a shack that stood on the edge of the range, Pegleg Jones had fitted a big tin reflector behind a kerosene lamp—a beacon, he explained, for the posse, in the event of their return. Behind this hospitable purpose, however, lay another one, somewhat less amiable. The sharpshooter hoped that the fugitives might take advantage of the rain and attempt to make their way back to The Spur.

As Pegleg sat in a darkened hut a few yards from his improvised lighthouse, with Derrigan's pistol in his lap, he conjured up a picture of a simple funeral for two. The mayor would read the burial service, and possibly throw in a few remarks about the way of the transgressor.

It must have been close to midnight when a glistening red fantom flashed through the cone of light and vanished out on the range. Pegleg jerked his pistol upward but dropped it again with a snort of astonishment. At the lower edge of the red apparition he had recognized the widow's dainty riding boots.

"Nellie!" he roared, leaping into the open.

No sound came back from the rain-swept range, and Jones, staked to the soft earth by his wooden leg, unstrapped the stump and hopped back to his hut.

"The third posse," he muttered.

THE rain, although heavy, had been only an April caprice, stopping as suddenly as it had begun. Nellie had not been out on the range more than ten minutes before an effulgent moon made the desolate plain glow and glisten like a Summer sea. In less than an hour she had reached Goose Neck Lake, where she paused to get her bearings from the abandoned Ford. Then, drawing a silver whistle from her pocket—one that Derrigan had given her—she placed it to her lips.

But she did not send forth the blast. A cold north wind had superseded the rain and laid a thin coat of ice upon the face of the range. In the dead silence of the night she heard broken but regular sounds—as of footfalls.

"They're back already!" breathed the widow.

Again she raised the whistle but again she paused. Derrigan was across the lake at least a mile away and, although the wind was blowing toward him, he might not hear the call. A desperate expedient occurred to her. Forcing the mule through the ice to the side of the sedan, she dragged out a dry cushion and soaked it with gasoline from the tank. As match after match was snuffed out by the wind she heard the crackling footfalls coming nearer.

Nearer, nearer, nearer!

"Darn it!" she cried in vexation. "I'll make a jackpot!"

Lighting the whole box, she threw it to the cushion and sprang out of reach. A pillar of flame shot up and, swelling in volume from the volatile gas, burst through the door and sent a fiery fork to the sky.

Two weary, wet and bedraggled fugitives pulled up with a start a hundred yards away.

The widow had withdrawn from the arc of light cast by the flames, but its wide circle extended far out upon the lake. Leaning over on the neck of her mount, she urged him to dash along the shore.

The fugitives paused with a gasp of astonishment when the tower of flame rose before them. Jock instantly recognized the blazing skeleton of the sedan.

"Henry," he yelled, "we've walked in a circle!"

At that moment the red mule dashed through the flame-lit area. Jock, to shoot the rider, raised the shotgun *from the left side* but Henry, shifting the bundle to his right hand, drew back his mighty *left fist* and smote his pal on the jaw. Jock went down like a struck bullock.

Nellie saw the strange pantomime and dimly guessed the meaning. Pulling up, she sent out a long blast from the whistle.

A friendly greeting came back from the bandit who had remained erect.

"Here, miss, I want to give you back your shawl-strap!"

Nellie rode cautiously to the man's side. Jock lay prone and motionless on the ice-covered ground, the shotgun still gripped in his stiffened hand.

"I'm afraid, miss," said Henry apologetically, "that the money is a little damp, but I think you'll find it all there. That was a thrifty idea of yours to give us the shawl-strap."

With a confidence that could have been born of nothing else but intuition, Nellie accepted the bundle of money.

A crunching clatter was borne to their ears by the wind. Derrigan was coming!

Henry drew in a long breath—the last he expected to draw in freedom.

"I wouldn't mind lending you my mule if you promise to leave it at The Spur," said the widow hurriedly.

There was something infinitely more satisfying than a spoken promise in the look she saw on the fugitive's face in the moonlight. Dismounting, she gave him a hand up.

Henry rode away without even a glance at the still figure that lay on the frozen ground. The clatter of the mule's hoofs merged with that of the approaching horse.

"You were right, Derry," cried the widow as the mounted man leaped to the ground, "they walked in a circle, all right—but it was a *left-handed circle*. That's why they returned to this side of the lake."

Derrigan glared at the motionless figure.

"The other fellow got away," explained the widow, "but he left this behind him."

She held up the package of stolen money.

The widow quickly apprized him of Stringer's fatally false assumption that only one of the fugitives was left-handed. From her place behind the cage she had seen everything that happened. Guessing the meaning of the mayor's boisterous laughter, it had flashed upon her that the other bandit had reached over the top of the cage with his left hand and with the same hand opened the door of the sedan. The lump on the right side of Stringer's jaw indicated that the blow had been delivered with the left arm. It only remained for her to return to the Ace and verify this point. The conjecture proved up nicely. There was a left-handed knot in the rope that fastened the door of the cage. It had been made by the mayor's assailant.

"How did you know it was a left-handed knot?" demanded Derrigan.

"Oh, I'm postmistress, you know," laughed the widow, "and the letters for Buried Ace come in packages tied in hemp string. Sometimes when I pull a slip knot from the wrong end it only becomes harder instead of loosening. Then I know that a left-handed railroad mail clerk 'tied out' that package for the pouch. It took me a long time to work out that little puzzle. You see, widows must rely on themselves."

At this point Derrigan burst into a roar.

"Don't laugh yet, Derry," she admonished. "You see I went to bed figuring that it wouldn't make any difference which way the men walked—they'd travel in a circle anyway. But it suddenly struck me that you were waiting on the wrong side of the lake. That's why I came out here."

Derrigan gazed at her in silent admiration, then stooped over the huddled thing on the ground. It remained motionless under his touch. All of Jock's earthly requirements could now be filled with a pine ulster. A pariah from organized society, he also had outraged the grim code of his kind and suffered the fate it prescribed. In his airily spoken purpose to double-cross Jim Link he had pronounced his own death sentence.

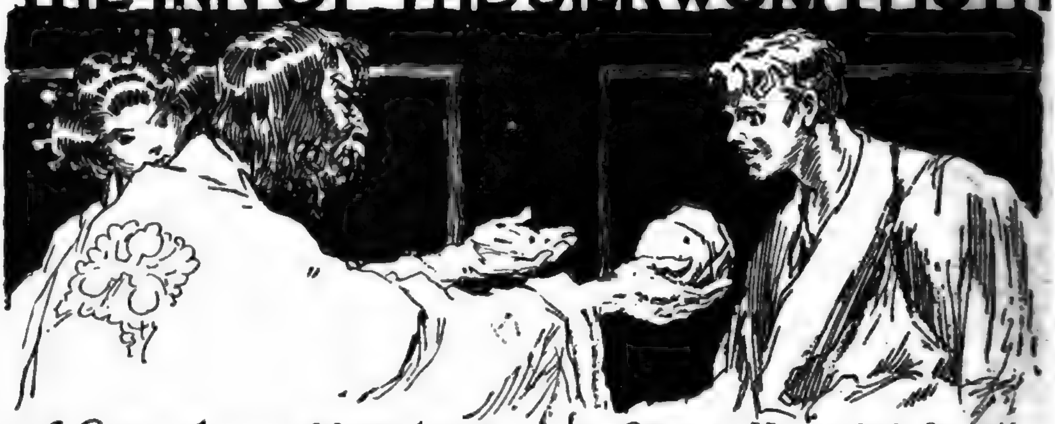
It was all an easy conjecture for Derrigan. The man who killed his pal with a punch had feared the same fate himself at the hands of the greedy and treacherous Jock. Back of it all, perhaps, lay some sense of chivalry and sentiment, not uncommon even in natures of the coarsest texture.

The mounted man heard the whole strange tale from the widow's lips and understood, perhaps, what she could not.

"The red mule will be there waiting for you, Nellie," he said huskily.

The widow said nothing about the dicker she had made with Mayor Stringer for the reward. After all, what difference would it make now? The money would be in the family anyway. She had made up her mind to marry Derrigan.

THE INN OF THE SILKWORM MOTH



A Complete Novelette

by Sidney Herschel Small

FROM the north angle of the street which leads into the courtyard of the Shinto temple, there outjuts a lane so narrow, so very dark, that even at noon no sunlight enters except slantwise overhead upon blue bars of dust. On the lane was the mission-house; it was now near five in the afternoon, and so dim in the library—a room of occidental furniture against a background of paper-paneled walls, with sectional bookcases covering the alcoved worship-corner—that lamps must be clapped for.

Gilbert Clark leaned back in his chair as if the interruption were a relief, but the other five men sat grim and upright, watching him. Across the table, around which all sat, was Forbes, who had brought the charges against his fellow-missionary Clark. Forbes nervously fingered his eye-glasses, apparently finding the servant's slow movements in lighting and placing the lamps exasperating.

Clark wished that it were all over. The cautious way in which Dr. Jameson, head of the mission-district, had led up to the climax was trying his patience. Thus far Clark had made no reply to any of the accusations. Limply, he felt that he should, yet each time the exact words escaped him.

At last the servant withdrew, and the feeling of tension grew keener after the soft snap of the closed panel. All could see one another's faces clearly, and all looked somewhat strained. In the interval of silence Forbes began to polish his glasses with a silk handkerchief.

"It might be well if Brother Clark would tell us his side," he said. "I think that Brother Jameson had made ours—er—that is, his own, plain."

Clark roused himself.

"It is obvious that you want me to resign, rather than to take—take—further steps," he said uneasily. "But of course I have admitted nothing whatsoever."

"Man, man you need admit nothing," Jameson blurted. " 'Tis clear on the face of it. You attend a banquet given by some of the local Japanese——"

"According to Dr. Forbes' orders," Clark piped timidly.

"I believed it wise to be conciliatory to the town authorities," Forbes said gently.

"In that you were correct," Jameson assured Forbes. "But, Clark, was it necessary to be conciliatory to the extent of drinking with them? To the extent that you did? Was it? Answer me!"

Clark felt himself flushing, and tried not to feel like a detected schoolboy.

"Would it have been courteous to have refused?" he retorted with a spark of heat. "They would never understand my reason for refusing, and have seen only an affront to their hospitality that——"

"You quibble!" Jameson snorted. "Now, tell us—did you drink, or did you not?"

"Brother Forbes has already covered that point in his charges," another of the men interjected. "And it appears that Clark admits it."

Jameson patted blank sheets of paper on

the table before him, across which a pencil lay.

"He must admit it in writing."

"And suppose I refuse to admit anything? Will not the fact that I was acting under orders from my superior, Forbes—now, I know you are about to say that wine was unmentioned!—will not that fact be listened to by the home board?" Clark's round face peered at the older men earnestly. "How do you propose to turn me out?"

"We will apply for the necessary powers," Jameson said curtly.

"On those grounds?"

Jameson sorted the blank sheets of paper and Clark marked the older man's quiet deliberation. Indeed, in spite of a certain feeling of tension, the proceedings had been characterized by a curious calm; Clark felt this calm deceptive. Furtively he eyed Forbes, and with no great liking. The rusty coat, the white of his observant eye, the craning of his neck deferentially toward Jameson, the very angle of his nose, cocked up for mischief, Clark decided, like a sparrow's tail.

It was all at once clear and unclear to Clark, the whole affair. He had known that Forbes looked askance at the newer methods Clark had brought from the States; had realized before this that Forbes' jealousy was aroused by his subordinate's excellent work, so different from the elder's doctrinated efforts. More than once Clark had been about to blurt out that he knew of a certainty that Forbes kept a jug of wine beneath the floor of his own room.

"Wash for the lean hog!" he thought now, with bitterness.

He thought, also, of the earnestness he had brought with him to this little village of Hishiura; the sports he'd taught the Japanese boys—sports that Clark knew of only by watching, for, at college, he had been such as he was now; eager, but plump, unmuscled; half afraid of bodily effort and wholly afraid of pain. But, even so handicapped, the things he'd done, and had tried to do, and was going to do—and now!

"I can not think any reason why you should not know," Jameson broke in upon Clark's musing. "Or, rather, I feel pain that I am driven to tell you what you already know. I will begin by saying that he who takes gold, in return for salvation, is beyond any pale."

"Can you prove that?" Clark said vehemently, his voice squeaking in his excitement.

"Give him the opportunity of disproving this, Brother Jameson," Forbes said, smiling.

Clark was surprized by Forbes' friendly intervention, yet wondered whether he saw anxiety in the man's face. On his tongue, hardly held back, came the desire to tell them all that it was not his place to disprove, but their own to prove. On seeing the dead faces which confronted him he threw off the last remnant of restraint, of duty, none more amazed at his words than himself:

"My observations on this subject would not tend to clear the air," he said, his hands trembling with the spirit that moved him. "You seem to feel that trifles are of more importance than the work I've done. You seem to be looking for evil in every corner, and I believe that you find it, too! But everything is for the best, and I still believe the world is a tolerable place—but, there, you aren't interested in my views. As to this veiled business of my taking gold in return for offering salvation, let me tell you that it is difficult enough to get disciples by paying them, let alone accepting money.

"Of course, there are a few men and women who are old that are anxious to join. They believe, these old ones, that by becoming Christians they have an added chance of entering Heaven. If we are right, they win. If we aren't, the Shinto priests or the Buddhists have protected them already. Now it is my opinion—I mean to say—go on and consider anything about me you desire," he ended with a final burst of valor. "I have resigned, or I haven't. I am guilty, or I'm not. You've kicked me out, or I left of my free will. Anyhow, good-by, gentlemen!"

But the last word was Forbes'—

"Brother Clark, Brother Clark, you are murdering your soul!"

In his room Clark later thought of quantities of chilling remarks to have given Forbes in return for that. None of them came to him as he left the meeting-room. That was the way it always was. Always afterward! Too late for any good. Not alone in this, but in everything. While he was being trained to become a missionary, it had been well enough to follow placidly the road his father had trod before him. But now he wished that the aunts who had raised him might have permitted him to build houses or bridges or boats—let him *do* something. Why was he a missionary? Because some one else wanted him to be!

His plump face perspired as much with this thought as it did from the exertion of stuffing clothes hurriedly into his one steamer-trunk. Yet with all his haste he was aware that he folded trousers, laid coats carefully into proper position, crammed interstices with discarded raiment to prevent the contents mulling about—and hated himself for it.

He packed a small valise also; clapped for the servant, ordered the trunk sent in care of the T. K. K., at Yokohama; heard the meeting below break up and, fearful of seeing any of his fellow-missionaries again, rushed out, bag in hand. Uncannily he felt that, screened by the sliding wooden *shoji* of the house's outer wall, Forbes watched him stumble down the narrow lane.

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THE police guard, unfeeling of the cool of evening after a heated day of duty, let Gilbert Clark pass unheeded through the little gate, although the guard knew that all travelers should account for what affairs they have. Yet foreigners have no reasoning about their coming and going; one *seiyo-jin* more or less in Hishiura made no odds.

The heart of the new-born Clark gave a great bound as he cleared the gate and saw before him the unused path, with grass tall upon it. Trees on either side interlocked shaggy arms and made a tent-roof of green, their trunks so obviously like the pillars of a church that Clark wished momentarily that he had taken the frequented road instead of this by-path. But, being free, he could not feel daunted long. At the second bend of the road the trees thinned and hills sailed into full vision in a long line of peak and hollow, velvety, dark, and brooding sleep.

At the sight of this enormous calm Clark forgot the passed afternoon. He began to sing; soon he discovered that he was not alone, and probably had never been. Urchins, ragged of kimono, slid from the soft field-mud where they played in the warm and pleasant ooze, blinked at him, bobbed their heads, and followed at a trot. Clark stopped; the boys stopped. He grinned at them and all grinned back, all save one broad-faced, thick fellow with large mouth and sulky eyes. This one continued to blink a great deal, was sullen, and met Clark's advances with a surly grunt.

"Where may I obtain food?" Clark asked in Japanese, after all the courtesies were complete.

The tea-houses on the main road he knew, but had never heard of one along this unused path, and was by no means certain if one actually existed. Least of all he desired being forced to ask hospitality at some dozen-hut village; this he had done in his early days, and did not care attempting it again unless necessary.

"*Ko ga nakya modose!*" muttered the blinker. "Eat rats for your hunger."

Clark laughed.

Bowing diffidently, one of the other boys explained—

"Momachi does not like the *seiyo-jin*," and, at the dig of an elbow, said nothing more.

"Why not?" Clark asked. "Am I so terrible?"

The lad examined Clark carefully.

"No," he decided at last, his scrutiny completed. "You are not terrible. You have a pleasant, fat face, like the God of Food at our temple. It is simply that Momachi likes or dislikes as his father, which," sagely, "is no foolish thing, for the head of his house has a heavy hand. You will see," he added, all of a breath, "that the father of Momachi, being sweeper-of-refuse at the temple, is therefore a holy man."

"Then *you* shall tell me where I may obtain the evening meal," Clark said, beaming, "and I will give you a copper rin-piece."

"There is a tea-house, beside the shrine of Jizo—not the big Jizo, but that of the seven hands—which is said to be——"

"Quiet!" Momachi ordered. "This foreigner has not told us who he is, nor of his business—if he has any. Perhaps he is one of the priests of the carpenter-god who lives across the water, and will cut us open with an ax or saw. Are you?" he demanded of Clark.

The white man changed the affirmative he was about to utter to an explosive—

"No!"

"What are you, then?" insisted the sullen-faced Momachi.

"What am I?" He heard Forbes' smug "murdering your soul!" as clearly as if the fellow's mouth had been at his ear again.

"I believe—well—yes, I am a—" lowering his voice—"a murderer!"

Momachi rolled this morsel on his tongue, the better to enjoy the flavor; walled his slant eyes, wagged his tongue from cheek to cheek succulently, stroked his flat nose, and gave every evidence of satisfaction.

"That is another thing," he said, when he had wrung the last enjoyment from that statement. "There is an inn——"

"By the shrine of the seven-handed Jizo," the other boy insisted, seeing the copper-piece being grasped from his hand. "A great tea-house, with geisha from Osaka, and *ne-san* that——"

Momachi cuffed him silent.

"It is a hard thing if one may not tell the honor of his village to a stranger," the speaker whimpered, holding his cheek.

"It would be harder if this stranger—who is a great and honorable man!—went where you tell him," Momachi retorted. "That is no place for him. He wants no geisha from Osaka, nor any other place, cow-face! He desires solitude. No questions. *Yoh!* give me the rin, *seiyo-jin*, and—no, I believe that I will do this for nothing, never having met a murderer before! and I will go with you to an inn I know of—or have heard of, which is the same thing—where you will be well cared for. That is," less glibly, "I will go nearly there. Not that I fear entering! No, not that, never that! But——"

He faced about and brayed the others down with—

"It is against the orders of my father!"

Chuckling, with the tattered Momachi at heel, rin clutched tightly in one grimy paw, Clark strode along the path; a short, choppy step half prance and half waddle. He wondered idly where he was going. But what matter? He had long promised himself a tramp along just such paths as these, where tourists rarely or never came. When he tired of it he had sufficient money to take him back to the States. When he was ready to go. Not before.

Soon Momachi stepped into the lead, and left the path, crossing into the rice-fields. By indistinguishable signs the boy steered a course over mud that was hard and firm to the foot, although Clark's eyes could see no visible difference between the course they were taking and the surrounding soft ooze, penetrated already with pale shoots of rice or millet.

He saw thatched villages, each with its temple or so lifting tilted roofs of tiles above a congregation of huts, each with winged *torii* before it like a giant ideograph of stone. Here and there in the fields hung, motionless, inscribed paper charms, the banneret zigzags of characters being protection against rains and birds and insects.

Instead of skirting the final village Momachi headed for it; dimly Clark could make out the uprising peak of its temple, but all of the remainder was dark and obscure as the night which was nearing.

Momachi found a breach, apparently expected, in the outer mud-wall, and led Clark into a blind alley of low and jutting houses concealing lateral black corridors, full of squalor, kimonos hung to dry and forgotten, and cats, and left him with only a whispered word to follow the way until he saw an inn—the first one. True, the Japanese boy whispered another word to an alley-child as ragged as himself—that here was no ordinary *seiyo-jin*, not by any means—mouth to ear, horrified enjoyment of the tale of this terrible murderer, which lost nothing in Momachi's telling.

THE street of the Silkworm-Moth and its huddle of houses stands between the end of the invisible path along which Clark had come and the tiny town of Ogami's widest street—eight feet from side to side—stopping the latter's way into the open country like the bulge in a gorged snake. The inn in this street of the Silkworm-Moth, and named for it, sent forth no smiling and chattering maids to greet Clark. Instead, an ancient man met him at the dark entrance with protestations that the house was unworthy of the presence of such an exalted traveler. After so saying, the host stood as immobile as a temple image, his face bloodless as the vellum of a *kakemono* which hung behind him. His watchful eyes, however, were intensely bright in their deep sockets.

Clark asked for food.

The old man bowed again, drawing in his breath hissing against his teeth, and protested that while there was food, yet it was not of the quality to satisfy an honorable guest. Clark believed that the man lied with purpose, and did not intend permitting a white man to remain there. He was justified in this belief when he saw the urchin to whom Momachi had spoken sidle to the edge of the room, beckon, and with great winkings and snuffling, whisper to the inn-keeper, who, upon returning, admitted that if the *seiyo-jin* would wait food would be found and prepared.

The room to which the host took Clark hung over a little river at the bend of the stream. Even with every outer panel pushed back and wide open to the air Clark was as completely hidden from any eye in the street below as if they had remained closed; this because of the heavily leafed trees. The moon had been rising when Clark had entered the inn, but no tracery of light penetrated the foliage. A brazier blazed before a flat cushion, and Clark squatted on this *zabuton* and lighted his pipe with a bit of charcoal.

With the third or fourth puff he heard a footstep at the door-panel, and, turning on the *zabuton*, saw a geisha standing there.

She was tall and slender; the delicate paleness of her face even whiter through fear. The carmine spots on her lips shone brightly, giving to her expression the unreality of the frightened look a doll might have if transformed into life. She was carrying a *samisen*, her fingers clutched the wrappings tightly, and as she bowed Clark saw that her knees were trembling. She sat on the *zabuton* opposite him, and tried to smile; achieved nothing but a tightening of the lips.

The inn-keeper brought battered lacquer trays filled with bowls of food—too quickly for them to have been prepared specially—and after he bowed himself from the room the geisha began serving. Clark could see in her every gesture the fear of the atrocities of which she believed foreigners capable; sacrifices, barbarities, wildness and uncouthness, and rough love-making.

As the girl drew back the fold of her kimono-sleeve to the elbow and raised the tea-pot Clark said, half aloud—

"Why, the child is frightened to death," for the spout of the pot trembled against the rim of the cup which she was filling.

The geisha read the meaning of the words from their tone before Clark was able to speak reassuringly to her in Japanese. She smiled, and this time her lips parted from her pretty teeth spontaneously.

"Why did you fear?" Clark asked gently. Then, as she did not answer, "What is your name, child?"

"Nukero," very softly.

Clark persisted in his first question, and gradually drew the tale from her. The frightened Nukero had left the geisha-house to serve a white man. She had never seen one before. None ever came to this town of Ogami, which was on no main highway—but now, she explained prettily, she felt honored. Clark felt that something had been left unsaid. There was not sufficient in that to have caused her anxiety. But the geisha served the remainder of the meal in silence, and when he had finished Clark picked up the *samisen* and searched for some harmonies in the long minor-toned strings. He rasped the instrument with the sharp ivory pick, scratching forth something like the shrilling of cicadas; glanced at Nukero. Both laughed.

"It is said that men are too strong to care about making such a small matter as music," she said, still smiling. "That is why you are unable to play," she added apologetically.

Clark handed her the Japanese pipe which she had deftly substituted for his brier, and the girl knocked out the gray ash into the *hibachi* and filled it from a pouch of her own with silky tobacco, lighted it, and returned the pipe to him. He found every movement replete with grace, and settled back on his *zabuton* in comfort before speaking. Above all, he felt very paternal.

"In the country from which I came men as well as women play," he said, and when she shook her head doubtfully, continued, "Men do not think it weak."

"Then you found the *samisen* pleasant?"

"Those noises I made? You laugh at me, Nukero-san. I only made little scratches. But I would like to learn."

"You would truly like to play, O—O——"

She stopped, at a loss for more than the honorary prefix, and Clark helped her, explaining that his name was Clark.

She stumbled valiantly over the "l" sound—

"If, C'ark-san, you are like other *seiyo-jin* men, would they, also, find instruction pleasant?"

"You said that no white men ever came here before. If that is so, it will surely be long before another comes. Am I such a barbarian that you are afraid to practise upon me, Nukero-san?"

"No—not a barbarian," she agreed quickly. "I will teach you. Yes. Nor have we seen *seiyo-jin* before, as I said. If it is permitted to ask—there is nothing to interest *seiyo-jin* in Ogami—why did you come here?" This last with bated breath, for questions are forbidden by the code of the Twenty Courtesies.

"Why? I do not know. I just came, perhaps."

Primly—

"We expected you, C'ark-san."

Clark smiled, remembering the boys he had entertained with his singing.

"The fellow called Momachi will have work for his fists when he returns to his playmates. One of the boys must have run ahead of us, and told the news, after he was certain where we were going."

The geisha puckered her lips quaintly.

"Momachi? Other boys? Run with the news? The news of your arrival? No. The host of the inn, Kuni-oho, told my mistress of it days ago. True, we expected two men, but it was said that one—yourself, doubtless, since you are here—might precede the other. Which one," smiling, "which one are you?"

"Which one do you think I am?" Clark countered.

Her face became a puzzle, at once prim and thoughtful.

"It is written that a question is a dangerous matter to answer. For out of the first come many more. But I asked one of you, and you told me. However, *aei!* I do not think it will be harmful to speak. Which?"

She examined her fingers, as if to find the answer there.

"Which? Kuni-oho, the inn-keeper, said, when he summoned me now, that you are the man-of-knives—he *said* that you were—an evil man, and dangerous as a mating stork. But he is mistaken, I think. Therefore, if you are not that one, you must be the other. You *are* the other, C'ark-san?"

"I must be," Clark said gravely. "Yes, I must be."

"Do you pray often? As often as our own priests? Are there many maidens in your temple? Is your shrine of great wealth?" Nukero prattled away, regardless alike of her maxim on questions and Clark's amazed face.

Who, he wondered, had announced his coming? One of the boys must have known him for what he was—no, for what he had been.

Then, all of a breath, the geisha added:

"It is said that great good-fortune comes to her who touches *seiyo-jin* gold. Oh, no," breathlessly, "not to possess it, simply to touch. Have you a piece of such gold that I might touch, and, since I will pray as many prayers as I can remember while it is between my fingers, find true happiness?" Softly, "Perhaps you would pray also, and I would be doubly certain."

Clark moved a hand, to reach for the little roll of American gold with which the missionaries were paid; moved his head as well, and became aware that the paper-panel which separated his room from the hallway moved slightly, as from some eager body pressed against it.

"Some other time, Nukero-san," he told her. "Possibly I have one, but I am not certain."

"It will bring happiness to me," the geisha smiled.

"But not to me, if I showed my money," Clark thought grimly.

His round, smooth face must have shown his notion, for the geisha turned away her head.

After a moment of silence she rose from her *zabuton*, asking—

"Shall I serve your first meal in the morning?"

On the affirmative, she gathered her *samisen* into its wrappings again, went to a concealed chest of drawers, painted to appear as a panel, drew out quilts; arranged them to her satisfaction upon the dingy, mottled yellow-brown matting of the floor, hoped that the goddess of sleep and Sadzuba would bring him rest, bowed, and left him alone. He thought that he detected a tiny sibilant sound in the corridor, mice perhaps, but was not certain.

A faint breeze in the great trees came into the little room over the bend of the river like a sleeper's sigh. Clark felt lonely. A little afraid. He had left a sheltered, accustomed life, an ordered existence—for what? Existence, that was what it had been! Not life at all. He remembered now that he had been once told, by his aunts, that as a missionary he dwelt upon a solid fortress builded on a naked rock, impregnable. Impregnable indeed, he decided now without bitterness, to anything save treachery.

He made no pretense of mourning, and the recurring thought of the sneaking Forbes set him shuddering with anger.

Clark was half of the mind to explore the queer, balcony-covered street below, as well as the rest of the town——

The wind moved the leaves of the trees steadily, with gentle persistence. From the interior of the inn came, with this true dinner-hour, muffled noises, where before all had been silent. The clatter of a chopstick against a rice-bowl, the hiss of steam escaped from a pot, a soft voice and hoarser reply, a laugh shrillingly cadenced.

Clark lighted his brier again, blew out the bean-oil lamp, and stretched in the dark at full length upon the pile of quilts. He had no intention of sleeping, but involuntarily wrapped the coverings about him, to prevent a cold catching him unaware; was disgusted by the very precaution.

"Red flannels!" he muttered.

Clark listened to the voices below, attempting to ascertain the exact words. Fell to counting the branches which grew from a peculiar fork of the tree-trunk close to the open *shoji*. Imagined dully what the mission-board's report might be, and did not care, for who was there to feel shame at it? Counted leaves of the tree, beginning from the branch-ends, and gave over, since the outlines were too indistinct for accuracy in determination. Watched the curvetting smoke from the *hibachi*, bright in the room's dimness, assume strangely recognizable shapes; the geisha's waving kimono sleeves, Forbes' angular neck, the flapping of Momachi's tattered pantaloons, a great bowl whirling with dragon-like monsters who were angry-eyed like the *hibachi's* coals. Red-eyed and winking. The whirling figures became indeterminate, fog-like: Clark slept.

UNCANNILY, for the inn-keeper had moved silently across the matting, Clark sensed the presence and awoke instantly. The old man kneeled and bent his forehead to the floor, rose, and arranged a spray of blossoms in an old iron vase, to stand in the worship-corner, and the white man compared this with the host's earlier, surly reception. Not to be outdone, Clark courteously asked the Japanese how old the inn was.

It had been his, the Japanese said, for forty years, his father's before him. It was very ancient. In the days of the shogunate it had boasted a score—two score!—of trained and pretty ne-san to wait upon the visiting *daim-yo*, where now the services of the geisha-house must satisfy any chance guests who were gentlemen.

"*Yoh!*" the old man ejaculated, warm to his work. "The shouting and laughter of those lords! Their purses were full in those days, I can tell you! From the rice-tax. The dancing and feasting! The presents and tea-money they gave! But now," sadly, "nothing is left, save the inn and myself. One as worthless as the other."

"The food was excellent and well served," Clark protested soothingly.

"Coarse and poorly prepared," Kuni-oho disagreed. "Yet, as to the serving, that is another matter. I will admit that it might deserve some small praise. For I trained Nukero myself. *Aci!* Not in the geisha-house, but here. She is the daughter of my son. *Ho!* Do not look startled. You do not understand, you foreigners. You see what is not there to see. She is a serving-maid. An entertainer. You *do* understand. Were you not kindly to her?"

With the irrelevancy of age, he added suddenly:

"She said that you are not the killer. It was said to me that you were. But you yourself," shrewdly, "have said nothing at all on the subject. Are you the one, or the other? Or—" sharply—"neither?"

"What would you say if I told you that you are correct in both of your questions?" Clark countered, leaving the third unanswered.

"What? *Aci!* That would be possible. I know, now, of a priest at the Temple of the Golden Carp who—who—what was it that he did? I grow old and forgetful. Of what were we speaking?"

Clark, wary of the sharp query as to his identity, said nothing. But after a moment the host's face brightened:

"I remember. It is strange how things escape me. I came into this room to speak to you of a great treasure that you might care to buy. We found it—we found it—where did we find it? Somewhere about the inn, carefully concealed. Wait and I get it," he concluded lamely, and without waiting for Clark to express the interest which he felt, the inn-keeper shuffled from the room, to return carrying an old wooden box.

When the lid was lifted Clark saw the first silk wrapping, then another, and another; some of brocade, faded, some of solid red or blue or rose. Finally the draw-string of the last bag was pulled open, and Kuni-oho lifted out a vase of crinkled, ultramarine pottery with a darker blue glaze overrunning the sides. The mouth of the vase was capped by a bronze and silver band irregularly carved.

"It is very lovely," Kuni-oho said slowly, "and ancient. A present to the inn. Given by—by—by a great lord, doubtless, but I can not remember his name. If I can obtain sufficient gold for it, I will repurchase Nukero. I tell you this because Nukero said you were—gentle with her. Was she not brave to come here for the serving of your food? None of the others dared. If you buy——"

His stumbling words stopped.

Clark took the vase in his hands, running his fingers over the perfect glaze. He did not ask the price, but shook his head.

"I have not sufficient money to buy this," he said.

"I did not expect you to buy it—now. But tonight? Or whenever you meet the other, and have transacted your business? If you are the priest, you have no money—now. But later, that is another matter! Or, possibly, if you are the priest, you will, later, have none at all—there, my words make little sense, for I do not know which of the two is you, and which that other. *Aei!* If there is fighting, it will be of interest to see if the *seiyo-jin* gods are more powerful than a knife! Well, we will talk of this after you see him whom you came to see."

Clark was uneasy. There was no reason why he should explain, and every motive for him to remain silent. What did a meeting between some priest and criminal in such a place as Ogami portend? A foreign priest. That meant a white man. Was the criminal another? It was interesting, and Clark's heart beat more quickly.

"Tell me," he said, "will this other man be brought to my room here upon his arrival?"

"Is it not an excellent place? None may see you here, and, if you speak softly, none hear. The rooms on either side of this are empty. Many of the rooms are empty, indeed, for few come to my inn. As I am to be paid a good sum, I will see that none disturb you. See—" shoving back a panel—"the neighboring rooms are empty. They have not been lived in for weeks—months. That is why I pray in vain for gold. If I had guests, the priests would receive less of the little money I have, for of what avail is prayer when gold flows in notwithstanding? Now! Nukero will serve you both, when that other arrives. I did not expect you until this morning. But no matter. As to payment for food and bed—there, you are not concerned with that, since the other made the bargain.

"But—if you would see—I am by no means certain that maidenliness is the armor that the Seventh Book insists—if you would see that your mate—well, not mate exactly, if what I have heard of him is true—that *he* be gentle with Nukero also—you will? Good. And you will not forget the vase, when your purse is full? Good again. Ask some extra yen, if the bargain between you and the other is not as yet made, and thus the vase costs you nothing."

"I will not forget," Clark assured him. "That is, if I actually receive more money than I now have."

"Ho!" Kuni-oho grunted. "Nukero was not mistaken. You are a priest, and no killer. Take care, then, of what strength you have, for how can even muscles avail, against steel? Or prayers? Or incense, either, for that matter."

He left with this, chuckling. Clark heard him pad down the corridor.

Here, Clark considered with pleasure, was a situation which was nothing less than delicate. As to what this meeting meant he had not the least inkling. The sensible thing to do was to pay his reckoning and leave. But he had done too many sensible things to do another! The natural would be to remain, out of pure curiosity. From the talk of Nukero, who knew nothing, and from the host, who knew more than he admitted, the white man had gained little more than a foothold. A foothold of—what? There might be trouble. He must not risk it.

However, why not leave the inn for a proclaimed stroll, search along the river bank for the great tree, clamber again into the room and hide in one of the two adjacent to his own? Why not? Tempted he certainly was by the unknown.

This he put into action at once, fearing that if he considered at all he would change his mind. When he reached the street he found a beaten white day where the shadows seemed carved out of ebony, the very dust quivering and restless under the heat. He was careful to inform Kuni-oho that he would return in an hour or so; that he would, likewise, walk out toward the rice-fields, which would take him to the riverside of the inn. He thought of saying that it might be still later before he returned, but this savored too much of explanation where none was necessary.

He heard comments upon his appearance, from behind the closed *shoji* of the hovels opposite the inn: *Aei!* But this was a powerful man, inhabited, it was said, by Kishibojin, mother of Demons! He had, but days passed, killed a man in some distant village, for no other crime than the fellow tossed a cigaret across the floor in friendly hospitality. The body had been fished out of the river whence it was thrown. It had nine wounds in it. Including one big enough to put your fist in! It was a sieve, not a body. Perforated!

This was by no means pleasant news to Clark, about to keep a meeting with this criminal. He was already consumed with a fidgety remorse for what had happened, shuddering under an obsession of nerves. Yet the voices puffed out his chest, and, outwardly, he was attempting to look the dare-devil.

He turned the corner of the inn; glanced hastily about, and walked hurriedly to the river's edge, screened now by the trees. Paused, to ascertain if he were watched, and then swung himself up into the tree, clambering heavily into the room he had but so recently left. He wasted no time now, shoved back a panel, and stepped into an adjacent room, closing the *shoji* behind him noiselessly.

Nor had he long to wait.

WHEN Kuni-oho the inn-keeper ushered into the room which was Clark's another white man, Clark became himself ridiculously pleased, although, notwithstanding his concealment, very much in confusion for a little while. He heard the host, clucking like an anxious, mothering hen, explain his, Clark's, absence. Explain, also, the isolation of the room. When Kuni-oho moved to demonstrate this Clark shivered—he might have known that the old Japanese would follow the original formula. But it was to the opposite room the host moved. The danger was past, unless the newcomer should investigate more fully himself.

"Your friend seemed ill at ease," Kuni-oho told the stranger.

"I will try and put him at his ease," was the answer, accompanied by a grim laugh. "You have done well, old one." Clark was aware that this white man's Japanese was as fluent as his own, bespeaking long residence. "I feared my messenger might bungle it."

"It is done as you said," Kuni-oho remarked easily.

"Good. Here—" money passed—"you have the agreed amount. Get out."

"I do what I can," Kuni-oho returned shortly. "Gold is scarce."

The other laughed.

"Your own was honestly made," he retorted, as the host backed from the room.

Clark examined the man who was smoking a cigaret and alone through a tiny hole, silently made by a wet finger-tip on the paper of the ancient panel. He appeared confident and yet uneasy. Every gesture showed that he was apprehensive, the mere shaking of the floor set him on edge, ready to strike. A man of flat brow, clean-featured, with decisive lips.

The host returned with Nukero, and the pantomime of beseeching hands, of eyebrows delicately arched, told more to Clark—and to the newcomer—than any words. They showed how far he expected, how far was prepared, to tempt his customer. There could be no more deft marketing of wares.

Clark considered the geisha with anxiety. Kuni-oho's attitude was now anything save that of a protecting grandparent. Had he assumed the attitude that he had with Clark simply to prevent a forestalling of his market? The girl was a child, yet Clark dared not warn her, could not! of what this guest was. Yet she already knew. Clark did not understand.

Nukero, twittering about nothing, served the guest with preliminary tea. The man drank gustily, and said nothing. Finally he grunted a question in English, and was reassured by the girl's blank face.

"Stay," he commanded in Japanese, when she would have left.

Then began the waiting.

The guest sat lax upon his cushion, Nukero was nervously attempting to appear at ease.

Nothing happened to give Clark, in the next room, even an inkling of what might came. Nukero ventured a courteous query or so, which were never answered. When, finally, she unwrapped the *samisen* she was waved silent.

FOR blandness nothing could equal the face of old Kuni-oho as he ushered a guest—another—up the ladder-stair and into Clark's original room. Whatever thoughts may have seethed in the ancient's brain, none at all were apparent on the surface. No telltale hiss of excitement, no blink of wonder, as he said—

"Here is the other," and, without so much as a glance at Nukero, waddled out again.

"Well, man," the first arrival said, "and why couldn't you get here earlier?"

Clark, behind the *shoji*, eased his muscles, preparatory to rising and glimpsing the visitor through his peep-hole—rocked back on the matting in amazement, his face running the gamut from incredulous wonder to angry surprize.

"I was delayed. That is sufficient for you," was the precise answer.

Not the words shocked him, for they had no import, but the tone! He could visualize the craning of Forbes' neck as the fellow spoke. It was Forbes. He was certain of that, even before he had raised up and seen the man's face for verification.

"I don't care what your reason was," the other admitted. "Only, why did you hold me off, week after week? Afraid of somebody?"

"No."

"Why not have met me in your own village?"

Forbes chuckled.

"I might have, indeed. But this was a trifle safer, one might say. Since a goodly bit of time has passed since we opened negotiations, I was careful. Doubly. Many things are spoiled by an instant's unwariness. I even made certain that—well, I came by a by-path, and investigated whether any other traveler had passed over it for several days! Not a word of it in the records. And there isn't another path to Ogami from my village."

Then, to the geisha—

"Take away that tea, and bring rice-wine."

When Nukero had left, he showed his teeth and held out both hands.

"Have you got the money?" As the other did not answer, Forbes insisted, "Gold, Carter, you know. Not notes, or anything like that. Gold."

Carter, with a displaying air full of alacrity and deference, dug into a pocket, held his hand there, took a deep breath, and withdrew the hand, empty.

"Yes," he nodded. "But—you, first. Then the gold."

The missionary drew himself into a posture of indignation.

"Do you believe that I would deliberately attempt to cheat you, Carter? You know the old saying, that there is honor, even among—among——"

"Say it," Carter urged, grinning. "Come, man, let's see the stuff. The geisha'll be back in a minute. Get busy, Forbes. Out with it."

"First the money," stubbornly.

Carter eyed the missionary deliberately.

"If I really didn't intend paying you, I'd—well, I expect I'd take it away from you. Which would, more or less, be justice. Did you get the stuff honestly in the first place? There—you needn't answer. I'm not interested in your lie. If you had, why all this secrecy? Why get in touch with an ex-jailbird to market it, a bit here, a bit there, where it can never be traced? I can guess, even if I don't know. Some of it you had your disciples—save the mark! —steal for you, all in the name of the church. For the salvation you promised them. Some you accepted before you'd even let them into your little flock. Some—bah! you can't fool me, you——"

"Is this necessary?" Forbes asked oilily. "As for your taking it away from me——"

"I noticed that you keep your right hand in your coat-pocket," Carter finished for him urbanely. "That may be the reason I've not taken the stuff already. Although," appraisingly, "I do believe that your hand is shaking so that you have little chance of hitting me. Now——"

Forbes held up his left hand warningly, and an instant later Nukero returned with a squat jug. She served both, but only Forbes drank of it. In taking the tiny cup from Nukero's hand the missionary's fingers brushed those of the girl: she made no movement that this was not accidental, but Carter's eyes narrowed with disgust.

"I want to get out of here, before you begin to be amorous," he said.

"A jailbird has delicate feelings!"

"He has! Either give me the packet of jewels, or don't. Then I'll hand you the money. This girl doesn't understand English. Well?"

Forbes blinked, wary, uncertain of his answer.

CLARK, behind the panels, was hard hit. Clearly, now, he saw why it was that Forbes had been so anxious to get rid of him. That his fellow-missionary had intended to force him to resign he did not believe, but he was certain that Forbes figured that the board would place the erring Clark in some large mission where they could watch him. This would leave Forbes by himself, for he would be alone until Clark's successor was sent—alone for a sufficient time to do what he was doing.

"Here," Forbes said at last, and handed over an irregularly shaped packet, which he had drawn, still with left hand, from his coat.

"Hum," said Carter, and gave the other a small coin-sack.

Neither spoke, until Forbes said unevenly—

"I believe I will send the girl away——"

"To count the money?" came the instant reply. "If any one has been done, it isn't you, Forbes. You are pretty certain that you've at least some of the gold—there, clink the sack; would iron make that sound?—but I may have bought glass. But—well, send her away," and, with an expression of disgust, heard Forbes explain to the geisha that he would eat later, and wished her attendance from that time on.

Nukero bowed, recognizing the unmistakable meaning.

Clark peered to watch Forbes' even fingers working with the gold, mumbling the count; the other man, Carter, made no effort to examine the jewels, and Carter believed that the packet truly contained that which Forbes had agreed to deliver, for to have kept such booty long made probable its detection, a theory that obviously was in Carter's mind as well.

"Satisfied?" Carter said, when Forbes thrust the money sack into an inside pocket.

"They should have brought a larger price," came the ready answer.

"Hog!" Then, slowly, "But you would be that, you know!"

"One of your criminal class should really——"

Carter grinned.

"Feel safer now, eh? As far as that criminal class crack goes, my dear and reverend friend, you know a story is pretty well enlarged after it has gone from mouth to ear a few hundred times. The mistake that I made was doing it in a small village. If it'd been in Osaka, now, or in Tokyo or Nagasaki that I'd hammered the little brown cop——"

Distaste spread itself over Forbes' face.

"Really, dear Mr. Carter, I am not at all interested in your affairs."

Carter stood up.

"Go to ——," he said.

"If you really must depart," Forbes smiled invitingly.

"When you tell the story, if you ever dare to, I suppose that you will say that you kicked me out, after taking the money away from me," Carter retorted, as he shoved the hall-panel back and strode out.

"Indeed and I will," Forbes threw after him. "Yes indeed, dear Mr. Carter. Certainly. Certainly." And seemed to take considerable joy from it.

Alone, Forbes drew from another pocket a second small bundle, similar to that which Carter had taken away. The sight of this amused him: he patted it, pressed it to him, evidenced great glee.

"He might have opened the one I gave him," he muttered loudly enough for Clark to hear. "But I was positive he would not. Psychology is a great thing. Now I have some real money, and the rest as well."

He reached for the jug, and poured himself a cupful, rubbed his hands, and then brought them together resoundingly.

"He'll never peek until he is out of this village," he added, half to himself. "I understand the man. He is cautious, and overly certain of himself."

Then, in Japanese, to Kuni-oho, who had appeared——

"The geisha."

"Payment," Kuni-oho observed to the wall, "payment has yet to be made."

"Did not Carter-san pay you? Did he not make all arrangements? Must I pay again?" Forbes shouted angrily.

"Payment has been made for food, and for a place in which to sleep," Kuni-oho answered evenly. "But you ask for geisha. That is extra. Four yen."

"I will not pay as much. In Osaka, now——"

"*Yoh!*" the host said, finger to nose. "You priests are all alike. There is a fat one at our temple, a fat one with a face so well-fed that it has a dewlap, who——"

"I did not ask you to speak," Forbes said sharply. "I said that—I give two yen, no more."

"You priests are all alike," Kuni-oho observed again. "Three yen, and it is agreed, provided you remember me in your prayers."

Nor could he be moved from that price.

Nukero came in full costume of silk and brocade, her hair now in the elaborate style of the professional hair-dresser. She looked more than ever doll-like, the illusion shattered, however, by the grace of her figure, and the silk hissing against silk slitheringly as she walked to her place and kneeled upon the cushion opposite Forbes.

In a moment the girl was to her feet again, trying for the panel to the hall, while Forbes' arms circled her strongly and muffled her would-be cries in a fold of her wide kimono sleeves. Instinctively Clark held back a moment before pushing open the panel behind which he watched: he expected every instant that Kuni-oho would stride into the room, transformed into an avenging parent.

Forbes laughed, drunk with the heady wine of possession, and Clark moved back the panel. Was he mistaken, or did he see in the geisha's eyes that she had expected just such an interruption? Certainly she showed no surprize. She twisted in Forbes' arms, so that slowly he was brought round where he might see Clark if he would but look upward: the geisha became, suddenly, limp, and Forbes' head raised gleefully. Every muscle of his face became rigid as stone.

"Hello," Clark said.

Here the inn-keeper, who had, from the sound, been without the door to the hall, did foolishly. He entered, and gave Forbes that outlet for his surprize—for his terrorized amazement at the sight of Clark, that broke down every one of the inn-keeper's protestations. Forbes was revealed, and stood thusly, ugly, himself. Demoniac gusts of laughing, chill rages flooded one upon the other, with the bulging gun in his coat pocket emphasizing both. Kuni-oho lost his little store of wit, sagged, and was finally pelted from the door by a storm of Japanese curses, in which all his ancestors, himself, and any descendants he might dare to have, were heavily involved. Nukero, trembling against the wall, heard him go with a sinking heart. Nothing was as had been planned!

Yet Clark seemed singularly unannoyed.

"Put the gun away, Forbes," he said smoothly, when the other dragged it out. "The girl is frightened. Besides, you do not know how to use it."

Remembering the man Carter, he added: "See how your hand shakes. You could not hit me with a bullet. You could not, indeed!"

But what had been so successful for Carter no longer worked. The gun did not waver.

Clark still stood by the panel which he had opened, and dogged Forbes with narrowed eyes. He had no hope of help, had Clark, and knew that any word of Kuni-oho to a police official—if so small a village as Ogami had one—would bring questions that would entangle the host himself. And yet he was unfrightened, even with Forbes' malignant face working itself into a new rage.

Forbes took a step toward Clark. Clark backed along the panels. When Forbes stopped, he stopped.

In this manner, eying each other, they made the round of the room. Clark made no effort to escape through the hall-door. Nukero cowered a few steps from the wall; pursuer and pursued brushed against her at every turn. She shivered and moaned at the touch, but they were too intent upon their game to know that she was there. Clark sensed several things: that Forbes realized that he had heard what transpired, that Forbes deeply desired to shoot, yet feared it with the same thought; that Forbes wished to close with him—then, in some noiseless way——

IT HAD seemed the thing to do, before, the dramatic thing, to walk into the room, and say calmly, "Hello, Forbes." Now, it struck him that this had been folly. He should have grasped the fellow. Disarmed him. Didn't they say something about a cornered rat? He wished that he could follow the workings of Forbes' mind. He felt cold beads on his forehead.

The game continued. Forbes was white and drawn, but, for all his jerked words of blasphemy the hand which clutched the pointed gun was steady; he hardly winked, his breath, which came through his nose, was even, although it whistled sharply.

Clark was certain now of Forbes' intent—if the other could gather strength to carry it out. He meant to injure him, in some way that would keep Clark in Ogami for a sufficient time for the other to get back to the mission again, with an established alibi. In the leg, that was where Forbes meant to hit him, and the other pressed after him that he might make the distance small enough between them that the first shot would accomplish the desired result. Death Forbes did not want. Nor to miss altogether.

At the third round of the room Forbes, gun still held toward Clark, swooped down over the eating-stand and grasped up a knife. Quick as his movement was, Clark was on him before he was up again. The gun clattered to the floor. The two rolled over and over, to come to rest with Clark beneath.

Forbes, horribly busy now, moved, twisted, and Clark felt the man's breath on his neck. He waited, his face pressed into the matting, for the striking of the knife.

For an instant Clark felt himself loosen as Forbes' arm rose, the arm, Clark knew, which held the knife: a long second, then a swoop of draperies, so suddenly, in that same split-second, that Clark felt the arm which held him relax before he knew what had actually happened. Nukero, witless, had become the cornered rat, and had stuck Forbes with her own knife, under the very stabbing arm.

"Come!" Nukero whimpered. "Come—oh, quickly——"

Dazed, uncomprehending, Clark followed.

Kuni-oho was in the hall. Without a word he directed both of them down into a room below.

"Tea!" he said hoarsely to Nukero. "Sit upright!" he commanded Clark. "Act as if you were all of the 'Three Monkeys.' You have seen no evil, nor heard it—be silent, as well—there, girl, pour."

The first amber drops ringed the cup.

"Did you think I did not know that you were in the next room?" he added very softly, after a pause of moments. "Am I so old that I am blind as well? Are you of such stuff as killers are made of? Or a priest such as—that white one is? Or was, possibly. We will know that later! Ho! Silence! That Carter is back in the room by now. We had no time to lose! *Aei!* He is there, assuredly. We had no time to lose, I say again. It went like clockwork, even if not exactly as I planned. And now you will hear feet! You hear, C'ark-san?"

Clark listened, and heard.

"*Aei!* The old one is not so old that his head is not alert. Feet! You hear them! That will be our police. Listen again!"

A thud. A deep Japanese curse. The fall of a body. Clark shivered.

"Do not fear," Kuni-oho breathed harshly. "I told the officers to be gentle with him, for he was gentle, as you were, with my Nukero. Now. I explain. Carter is found in the room. He entered as you did—by way of the tree. The priest is found on the floor. What more natural, then, but to say, '*hai!* There has been great fighting. The one has killed—' if he be dead, which I hope—'the one has killed the other!' And, I ask, will any one expect to find gold upon a priest? What they have they keep secure at home.

"Indeed," sagely, "I told the police that this missionary had not sufficient money to pay for his food and sleeping-room, thereby bringing them here! Nukero, little one, you obtained the gold, and the jewels as well? A man who thinks himself in love is a fool, or how else would he not have noticed your hands searching his coat? Well, that is ended. There—I must go. They call me. I will see—what I will see! Then we will make division, you and I, C'ark-san. Wait. I will not be gone long."

"I tell you I did not kill him," Clark heard Carter's angry voice. "Although I wish I had, the rotten cheat!"

Then the answering voice of an officer:

"No, *seiyo-jin*, you did not kill him, for indeed he is not dead, and will not die. But can you deny that you were in the room?" (He has him there, thought Clark, for Carter dared not explain.) "No? You do not deny? Well, need we look further? We have you, and that is sufficient. Your term in jail will not be long, as it would have been if it had been a Japanese you were fighting with. For our forgetting that a man such as yourself was in a broil in another village thank Kuni-oho-san. Though why he should befriend you I do not know."

Carter agreed that there was no reason volubly, but saw more in the matter than appeared on the surface. But he went along peacefully, hardly restraining a desire to kick the recumbent figure of Forbes.

"They have left him here to recover," Kuni-oho shouted gleefully when he returned to the room below. "But I was wise. They searched him first! But—" winking rapidly—"since he has paid well, we will care for him well. See, Clark-san, we divide. Nukero, give me that which you took from the priest."

He took the coin sack and packet.

"Now, suppose we say," craftily, "that you take the jewels, and I the gold? They are of about equal value. No, your portion will be more than mine. And you need not fear, for I give you the jewels as a free gift, and so they are honestly come by. You can sell them, and if questions are asked, refer the matter to me—no, that will not do. It would not be wise. Suppose——"

"I will take the jewels," Clark cut off the stream of words. "Give them here."

Kuni-oho scratched his bald pate.

"Be careful, little priest, where you sell them. Or there will be great trouble."

"I will not sell them."

"They will be excellent to give one's wife," Kuni-oho agreed.

Abstractedly, Clark said aloud—

"I'll give them back, if I can find who they were stolen from."

Kuni-oho grunted, peered at Clark:

"I believe you will!" he said. "I believe you will! Then—wait—" and shuffled away, to return with the boxed vase. "Here. Take this. Then something comes to you from it all. It is really yours, for it had served its purpose. It told me you were not the priest, and not the killer! It told me——"

The inn-room suddenly stifled Clark.

"Good-by," he said abruptly, and dropped a coin on the stand for his reckoning.

"He is not like other priests," Nukero whispered to her grandfather, watching Clark's retreating back. "He is honest."

"Honest he may be, but, like all his brothers—" scratching his head—"he is a fool. Does one give away the means to obtain gold? *Yoh!*"

Then, still more slowly, hand plucking at scanty eyebrow: "Possibly, though—possibly—perhaps." He laughed loudly. "*Aei!* Nukero, little daughter of my son, I grow old! Those jewels will remain in his possession, not another's, although he had the look of a truthful man—and he has my vase as well!—those priests, those priests, they fool us all," he ended, laughing again.

THE road, that unused path, which leads from Ogami to Hishiura, gleamed white where cobbles powdered the thick grass between. There was no moon, but the stars were so hot and clear that Clark could see, far distant, the gigantic Jizo-Sama at the crest of the Hishiura temple; see also the nimbus of fire gilded about it break into sparkles from the light of the courtyard lanterns.

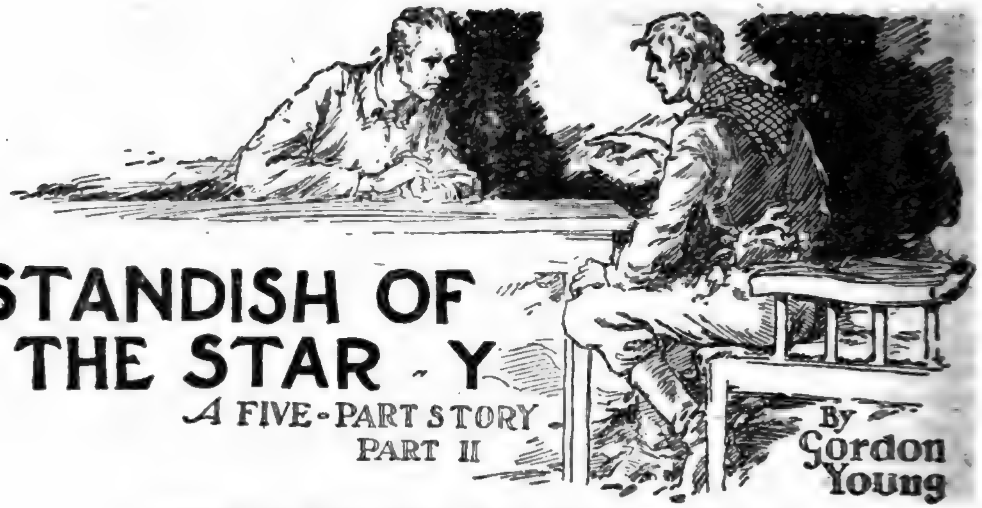
Clark did not sing, as he had when he had walked along this path before. Yet his feet seemed the lighter, and he was unutterably content. Just what he would do, after the return of the jewels, he did not know. There was time enough to consider that. The great bell of the temple clanged—*bong! bong! bong!*—and Clark strained to hear the waterfall of chanting voices that accompanied the prayer-hour: heard only the vespers of the frogs as, that dawn, he had heard their morning-song. Yet none of the beauty of sight or sound held him. What he thought was:

"I would have thrashed Forbes, even if Nukero-san had not interrupted. I would! I would!"

Reiterated, the notion lost force. He knew better.

"I must learn to use a pistol," he muttered.

Fire-flies glowed in the trees, which retained, even in the night, the illusion of a church interior. This no longer distressed him; his shoulders were squared, and he swaggered as he walked back toward the mission-town he had so angrily left.



STANDISH OF THE STAR-Y

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART II

By Gordon Young

Author of "One Chinese Night," "Wrong Blood—Strong Blood," etc.

The first part of the story briefly told in story form.

"STAY where you are. Situation here worse than ever. Really dangerous to come. Am writing you in detail—C. C. Renalds."

Norman Standish, back East after a trip abroad, perused his uncle's telegram and frowned. After his mother had died, leaving the Star Y ranch to his half-brother Bob and himself, he had decided to inquire how matters stood at Martinez. This was his answer. It took him two minutes to make up his mind. Arrived at Martinez, he put up at the Davis's, as the one hotel had been called when Colonel Standish lived and Robert and Norman were boys. Quite inadvertently he learned from the bartender, Welch, that Renalds had acquired a black name in the town. Therefore Norman felt it would be best to conceal his identity a while longer.

In the barroom Norman listened as two "nesters" talked with Welch. His heart turned to ice as he heard that Robert had been found dead in the desert with a bullet-hole in his forehead. He also heard that Robert had been against Renalds' tactics at the Star Y and as a consequence nephew and uncle had had many quarrels.

"Who done it, you reckon?" asked the younger nester. His tone implied that he had suspicions of his own.

"Who done it!" the bartender repeated contemptuously. "I allow that no man what's got half my sense, the which I ain't braggin' is overmuch, won't make no guesses out loud. Somebody seems to be doin' a ——'s plenty not more'n a hundred miles or so from here. But I ain't mentionin' names."

As he listened Norman heard that Renalds was waging a merciless warfare against the nesters who sought to make a living in his section. Renalds had gathered to the Star Y a gang of hard-riding, reckless-shooting cowboys who would stop at nothing.

That evening the Star Y hands, headed by Harvey, the foreman, came in. One of them, Buck Blevins, forced Standish into an argument. Just as the cowboy aimed a blow at the Easterner, Keyes, the telegraph operator, shouted:

"Buck! Don't! That's Renalds' nephew."

When Blevins had drawn back, abashed, Harvey stepped forward and questioned Standish. Then, when Standish admitted that he was Colonel Standish's son, the ranch foreman made arrangements for him to go out to the Star-Y on the following morning. He also announced that Renalds was absent from the ranch on business.

Later, in the barroom, Standish heard of the disappearance of Old Sawyer, an old-time Westerner, who had been Colonel Standish's friend as well as Bob's, and no particular admirer of Renalds.

THE next morning Simmons, the cowboy dedicated to the job of seeing Standish safely out to the Star Y, appeared. Through a ruse Simmons and the blacksmith, "Blackie," pretended that the horse Standish was to ride was unbroken. Sensing the hoax, and his pride hurt, Standish forced the horse into a wild frenzy, and was thrown. He won the respect of the two men when he insisted on riding the horse to the Star Y.

IX

FOR hours Norman and Simmons rode out across the plains toward the mountains; and here and there, dotted all across the landscape were patches of green, a few struggling trees huddled about a house, the orderly row of fence posts. Nesters had come into the country.

At first Simmons had wanted to talk. He felt a little guilty, and moreover quite friendly toward Norman, who, anyhow, wasn't a real tenderfoot and so not beneath the conversation of a cowpuncher. But Norman was unbending. He rode in silence.

Simmons hopefully mentioned rustlers and Star Y cattle; but Norman was not interested. He referred to a recent killing, but this too was received in silence. He prophesied war with nesters, cursed them, and got no reply. Then he gave it up and began to sing an endless song about—

"A pore cowboy he went to town
For jest one drink all aroun'—
Got hisself so full o' nose paint
That where there was a town, now there ain't."

They rode on, jogging through the hot day. The wind came up with steady breath, stirring the dust into thin, hurrying smoke.

Again and again Norman caught the glint of shacks, not yet weather-stained, on the barren ground. Fresh settlers. When he had gone away there had been but two houses between Reddin's and Martinez.

"Country's building up fast," said Norman.

"Crowdin' in toward the mountains too. That's where it hurts. Over by McCullough's."

But Simmons, having got warmed up to his song was in the mood to keep going:

"A pore cowboy he fell off his hoss
An' went to —— to see the boss.
Saw the horns of the —— man
Then roped an' give him the pitchfork bran'.

Says he, 'These cows look awful queer,
But they are all that I see here.'
So he roped them ——s which he could fin'.
'Now,' says he, 'this range is mine.' "

At length after miles of deep thought, Norman turned in his saddle and asked pointedly—

"Why does everybody so dislike my uncle?"

Simmons abruptly broke off singing, then with great presence of mind began blaming his horse for the interruption:

"Here, you wall-eyed son of a motherless toad, what you mean by gittin' ready to jump that there way! I'll bite your ear, you." Then to Norman, "Was you speakin' something?"

"Why does everybody so dislike Mr. Renalds and his men?"

"Huh? Do they? Waal, I hadn't heard much about about it, seein' as how I'm not what you might call a sassciety man, an' don't git around much. What all you been hearin'?"

"That you terrorize nesters who come in here and legally take up the land. That almost every man in Renalds' employ is a gunman."

"Who on earth could have been a-tellin' you that?" Simmons inquired with every appearance of innocent doubt.

"Is it true?"

"Hear that, you legless, hamstrung shadder of a hoss? Me an' you, bronc, we ain't well thought of in this here man's country. I guess as how we'll jest naturally have to curl up in some arroyo an' pine away. Life it ain't worth nuthin' if squatters an' storekeepers don't cheer like they was gittin' a free drink when your name it is mentioned. Boo-hoo, bronc. Boo-hoo."

"Have any nesters been killed on the Star Y range?" demanded Norman.

"Look here, son, you're gittin' awful personal. Now take me, I'm a peaceable man from Oklahoma what never hurt nobody. Why, I go clear out around the barn an' crawl in the hay if anybody jest mentions shootin'. If you want to see some killers you go look up Red Allister's outfit. All the men down his way pack two guns."

"Allister's another. He didn't have a good reputation when I was a boy."

"I reckon as how Red's about the same now as when you knowed of him. I ain't got nothin' personal ag'in' Red, only I think he's about three feet lower 'an a snake's belly. There was a girl—you'll see her at Reddin's. Toina. She was Allister's girl. Used to be purty. Ain't bad lookin' yit. Funny about women. Allister treated her like a dog, yit now if you want to make 'er hate you, all you gotta do is say somethin' ag'in' Red Allister. She shore didn't like your brother Bob."

"He and Allister were enemies?"

"In a manner of speakin' I allow they was. Bob he was a reckless ——, an' about two months ago he sent word to Allister that he'd kill him on sight."

"Fuzzy Butler was an Allister man, I hear."

" 'Pears like you've done been hearin' a plenty."

"And Allister is Mr. Renalds' right-hand man. Do you think my uncle had anything to do with Bob's murder?"

Simmons eyed him carefully, then answered slowly:

"You're askin' a power of questions, Mr. Standish. But I'll tell you something. I ain't been in this here country long. Only about three year. Durin' that time I ain't heard nobody intimatin' as how Black Renalds would hire somebody to do any shootin' for him. It's general the opinion that Mr. Renalds ain't afraid of nothin' or nobody. Why he puts up with Red Allister I don't know. But Renalds he don't appear to encourage folks to help him run his ranch by tellin' him what he does that's wrong."

"What did Allister and my brother fall out over?"

"Cows I reckon. Poker an' cows makes most o' the trouble. Now that squatters are bringin' women in, they figure a bit in the shootin's. A cowboy jest naturally can't see a woman without wantin' to git married. Why, Jim Harvey sent Buck Blevins over one time to tell them there Fraziers to skeddadle, an' Buck he come back clear plumb gone on little Jess Frazier. They say as how Buck went to your brother Bob an' got him interested in them Fraziers. That Frazier outfit's made a powerful lot of trouble. They're right down in one of our pastures."

"Have they filed on the land?"

"I dunno. That ain't got nothin' to do with it. It's cow country. It shore was a bad thing when old Colonel Standish put in that dam an' them wells an' set alfalfa to growin'. Then old McCullough, he's squatted down right over south on our range, an' is raisin' alfalfa and gittin' nesters to move in around him. One thing you got to say for Allister: he's got the nesters on the move down in the Santee country. And I reckon come this round-up there'll be more of 'em git."

"What do you mean? What will the round-up have to do with it?"

"Oh, nothin'. Only I hear the nesters may be urged to git out."

"If they've filed on the land you have no right to move them. And McCullough has."

"Say, you talk powerful queer. Ain't this range yourn? Mr. Renalds he ain't got no relation but you. You talk worse than Bob. He only stood up for them there Fraziers an' old McCullough, the last bein' natural on the 'count of Kate an' knowin' old Mac so long."

X

RIDING all morning the mountains scarcely seemed nearer. The nature of the flat country hardly changed until they came to the mile-wide basin, near the center of which stood Reddin's roadhouse in the midst of cottonwoods. The road-house was a queer structure, with a narrow upstairs, of adobe, shake, cottonwood logs and unsurfaced lumber, weather-aged. Back of the road-house were quarters for the Mexicans, sheds and corrals. Chickens ran about, but there were no dogs. Reddin hated dogs.

The ground about the house was as hard as a floor, almost as bare except for the cottonwoods and the few flat weeds, spreading on the ground, as if to remain inconspicuous, near the water trough and wash-up bench, where the ground was caked or soggy from discarded water.

In the early days this circular valley in which Reddin's stood had been given a bad name, and it was still far from having a good one. Before roads led to it, such a natural hiding-place had been used for concealing stolen cattle; but when travel began to pass that way after the railroad was built, somebody hit on the idea of using the 'dobe shack that had once been the home of cattle-thieves for a bar to cheer the traveler on his way.

Then Reddin, who had been running a saloon in the town of Santee, down near the Santee Divide, got hold of the place and claimed to have property rights on the section in which the basin lay. He enlarged the adobe quarters, brought in a few women and made money. But now the country had begun to be dotted with nesters, who were slowly crowding the cattlemen up against the mountains; and some of these nesters looked questioningly at the basin, rich of soil, with water near the surface, and began to doubt Reddin's ownership.

But it was a long way to the land office. Boundaries were vague; and Reddin stood well with men who would have burned out or shot nesters. In former days it was said that he and Allister had been close friends. Anyhow, the nesters, with their women folk, did not like the goings-on at Reddin's; they had children growing up and were making homes on the plains.

Reddin did not like nesters. They did not drink in a manly fashion and showed little of that convivial spirit which stood drinks for everybody.

As Norman and Simmons came into the wide, dim room, low of ceiling, they instantly saw that something unusual was being talked over by the four or five men and two half-breed women gathered at one of the tables; some sitting, some standing. Every one looked around quickly, keenly eying Norman.

Reddin, big of paunch, short of breath, bald of head, with nearly hairless, sandy eyebrows and a red, beefy face, sat in a chair, knees wide apart.

Leaning hand to cheek, elbow on the table, sat a young fellow who in no point of appearance resembled other men of the country. He had a young, thin, dissipated, sickly face; the skin seemed to have shrunk against the bones of his cheeks. His hair was rather long, but neatly parted and brushed; his clothes too were Eastern and in good condition. His name was Barney. No one knew from where he came, but every one knew where he was going, and soon.

He was a consumptive; also a nimble-footed dancer, and at times, gasping for breath, would throw the old buck-and-wing through all of its intricate shuffling and toe-twisting. Also he played the banjo. He gambled a little; also he rolled hundreds of cigarets, neatly arranging them in a cigar-box that he might ever have a smoke ready though he was playing for dancers with no time to pause for more than the striking of a match.

Every one liked him, as the minstrel is always liked in rough places; besides, there was something of the innate gentleman about Barney, and all knew that he would not live long.

One of the women held her hand on his arm and glanced toward him repeatedly. This was Toina. She claimed to be part French, but was supposed to be mostly Mexican. Her features were wretchedly dissipated, she was nervous, excitable, and not yet without a few scraps of beauty though her dark eyes were fierce and her mouth hard.

The other woman had a fat bland face; she was fat, and not young, heavy, slow, nearly expressionless, but good-natured. She had been at Reddin's for a long time.

There were four cowboys in the room; they were of a type that never ride long for any outfit, being the sort that pass from one range to another, oftentimes galloping long in the night to get away. They were hard-looking men in worn trappings.

Simmons knew them all by sight, and gave a general but rather aloof greeting, with a more direct word to Barney.

"How's everything, Barney?"

Barney smiled, his thin lips wrinkling in a sickly, friendly way.

"Tip-top, Slim—for such of us as aren't nesters."

"Waal now, what could have happened, I wonder, to make them land-louses more unhappy than is usual."

Reddin, asthmatically slow of speech, raised a heavy arm as a signal that those about him were to keep still for he wanted to tell the news. He took his time, eyed Norman, then, puffing and hoarse, said—

"They burned out Frazier's yesterday!"

"What's that?" demanded Norman, stepping closer.

"Here, son, keep your shirt-tail tucked in," said Simmons, laying a hand on Norman's shoulder.

Reddin added—

"Them there Fraziers squatted right down on Star Y range an' wouldn't budge none, though they been warned a-plenty, I allow."

"And," screamed Toina, "the warning's been passed from Santee River clear to Reddin's. Them nesters has to go. Red's doin' it now!"

"Is that so, really?" said Simmons respectfully, almost too respectfully.

"Now that Bob Standish is out of the way I guess Black Renalds will give Red a free hand and go after things in proper fashion," said one of the cowboys.

Norman felt his knees grow weak, but his heart beat hotly.

" 'Buckaroo'," Simmons drawled coldly, eying the last speaker, "I don't sort o' remember what name you-all is givin' this time o' year, but I allow you talk too —— much!"

Buckaroo's right arm stiffened with the fingers curved backward to grip something at his hip, and he glared a challenge at Simmons, who, with the flash of a striking snake, had drawn and held his gun muzzle-on from the hip.

"Don't ever stop like that when you start to show me something, Buckaroo. Keep a-comin'—keep a-comin', 'cause I'm a little wee near-sighted, an' maybe I won't see your change of mind."

The others now began to pick themselves from the floor and lift their heads above the table. Where there is much talk there is little shooting. Of those at the table only the sick Barney and the ponderous Reddin had remained motionless. Reddin never moved quickly except when he was in line of fire. But Barney, whose body was rotting away inside of him, had the heart of a hero.

"Now jest what all was you remarkin', Buckaroo? I'm awful hard o' hearin' at times."

"I merely said it was time the nesters were driven out," Buckaroo answered sulkily.

"Them sentiments is all right, an' havin' expressed 'em, now let somebody else do the talkin'. Savvy?"

Buckaroo did not know much about Simmons personally, but he knew the name that those men had who rode with Harvey of the Star Y; and he had just seen enough in the way Simmons' gun came from its holster to feel that there wasn't much exaggeration in what people said.

"Now gents," gasped the puffy Reddin, who was not all shaken by the little gunplay, but was simply fat and wheezy, "now jest suppose you give your hardware to Clara here, an' let's put 'em behind the bar for the time bein'. These boys are good fellers, Slim. I know 'em."

Barney made a slow grimace and glanced steadily from narrowed eyes at Reddin.

"All right, Miss Clara," said Simmons. "You jest start collectin'. An' if you come to me last, I'll chip in."

Clara arose and with waddling steps, and without the least interest in what she was doing, began receiving the belts and holsters. Simmons unbuckled his and with a low bow handed it to her.

"What about Frazier's?" demanded Norman pointedly of Reddin.

Reddin regarded him with slight disfavor. He did not approve of such forwardness, such an air of assertiveness, on the part of strangers.

"Friend o' yourn, Slim?" asked Reddin.

"Some," said Simmons. "A quite considerable lot, you might say. Until Renalds gits back from that there Kansas City I reckon as how I'll take orders from this young feller. His name is Standish—Mr. Norman Standish."

Every one now regarded Norman with renewed interest. One of the cowboys whistled softly. Buckaroo suddenly felt less sullen, but without being more friendly. But he saw the reason for Simmons closing his mouth.

Reddin arose heavily, beamed and held out a hand:

"An' don't you remember ol' 'Dad' Reddin? You was jest a little shaver when you and the Colonel used to stop over night here, many's the time."

"Yes, of course. I remember you."

"And Mrs. Standish, how is she?"

Norman resented the inquiry. It was as if Reddin had known her.

"Dead," he answered bluntly. Then with firmness, "I want to know what about the burning out of Frazier's."

Simmons coughed, then, seeing Norman turn and look at him, coughed violently to carry it off. As soon as he recovered from his coughing he allowed as how his windpipe was so full of dust that he could hardly breathe.

Reddin loudly ordered Clara to set forth the drinks; then, as if suddenly recalling Norman's questions, he guessed that them there Fraziers had maybe upset a lantern in the barn. Served 'em right, squattin' down right in the middle of fenced land.

"Your land it is," he concluded indignantly.

Norman asked other questions, but no one would tell him anything; but he saw Barney staring at him with steady dark eyes that glowed from sickness.

Norman then became thoughtfully quiet. He knew that no one would tell him anything.

For a few minutes the talk was general, with Buckaroo and his companions having little to say, except between themselves at times and with low voices.

Simmons elaborately appeared to wonder who could have been giving the warning to nesters.

Toina mentioned Fuzzy Butler, and his sudden departure.

Before Simmons could get over a signal, Reddin had said, "A danged good feller was Fuzzy," all unconscious that he was on the right way to make a mortal enemy of Norman.

But Norman, concealing his feelings, asked quietly:

"Who is this Fuzzy Butler? What happened to him?"

For a moment no one answered, and every one watched him. Even Simmons concluded that he had not heard the rumor that linked Butler's name with Bob Standish's death.

Reddin said:

"We don't exactly know what's become o'

Fuzzy. He's jest up an' went somewheres. Likely he had some trouble with a feller. Maybe they had an argument an' Fuzzy he won it—an' moved on quick. When you lose an argument in this here country you don't move none!"

Laughter followed Reddin's wheezy witticism, and, pleased, he set up the drinks again for everybody. Clara with placid unconcern brought around glasses and the bottle.

Norman again saw Barney's feverish eyes enigmatically staring at him.

"How's the grub pile?" demanded Simmons.

"Plenty," said Reddin. "We've all et. But—Clara, show these gents the feed trough."

So Simmons and Norman followed the waddling steps of Clara into the dining-room.

By a peculiar arrangement in the rambling, piece-meal construction of Reddin's road-house there was a passageway directly from the saloon into the kitchen, and from this passage a door opened into dining-room as well as another directly from the kitchen into the dining-room.

"Set down," said Simmons to Clara, pulling out a chair, "and talk to a feller."

"The boss he will yell," Clara answered indifferently.

"No he won't," said Simmons, with meaning.

Clara gazed at Norman, as if expecting his invitation, which she did not get; but she sat down anyhow.

Norman's feeling toward Simmons for bringing such a woman to the table gradually changed as he saw the trend of questions asked her; for Simmons, in his roundabout way, was making inquiries as to Buckaroo and what he and his companions might be doing. And she, thinking it was because there had nearly been a fight, did not know that Simmons had cattle-thieves of Turges Cañon in mind.

What Simmons learned convinced him that though these fellows might be a little on the rustle, and jerk up a horse here and there that belonged to some nester—which wasn't exactly "hoss-stealing," since anything that tended to discourage nesters was helpful to the range—yet there was nothing to connect them up with raids on the Star Y. It was excessively dangerous to meddle with the Star Y stock. Renalds had gathered in gunmen, both for the Star Y and the 44 Circle.

The crowding of the nesters cramped cowmen's range, so that there were new disputes about water-holes and such matters. The little cattlemen were selling out; the big ones, or many of them, were moving their cattle and picking out some particularly favored range and making a determined stand against the covered wagon and its squatting occupants.

Also the days of cattle-rustling on anything like a large scale were past; there wasn't a chance in the world of getting Star Y cattle across the plains. The country was too settled. Reports would have come flying back. Nesters might use beef or catch a maverick, but there could be no wholesale thievery out in the open country; and to run cattle off over the mountains required a knowledge of the back country such as few men had.

XI

AFTER dinner they returned to the barroom. Buckaroo and his friends were at a table with Toina, talking lazily, without interest. Norman overheard Red Allister's name mentioned in favorable tones.

Reddin sat apart, knees wide, smoking a pipe and breathing through his mouth, puffing, gasping. Barney smoked and rolled cigarets with long, bony, sensitive fingers. Clara went behind the bar and set out the whisky for Simmons.

Norman, not wanting a drink, went out of the house to look about. As he came in he had noticed some horses in one of the corrals that interested him. Besides, he wanted to be alone.

A Mexican, having pumped the trough full, spoke respectfully to Norman in a soft tone and disappeared round back of the house. An old white man, with a long beard, hobbled past on a cane, speaking pleasantly. He was an old, broken-down miner who did feeble chores about the place, and so was kept from starving to death.

Norman leaned his elbows on the corral and looked the horses over. Some of them were pretty animals. There was a slim black with a star on the forehead, white stockings on the forelegs, broad of chest, with jack-rabbit haunches, that took his fancy. He tossed a small clod at the black to make him turn and show the brand. It was a vented Star Y with a double S to show the new owner. Norman did not know the double S brand.

Presently he heard a light step, a cough, then a paroxysm of coughing. It was Barney.

Norman had never seen any one cough like that. For a minute or two, with violent gasps for breath, he coughed as if tearing loose his ribs. When he paused he wiped his lips with a clean handkerchief, and it came away stained with red.

"I got 'em bad," gasped Barney, trying to smile.

He leaned against the corral, getting his breath.

"You ought to be in bed," said Norman.

"I will be—soon," Barney smiled in a slow, ghastly way. "Here's one lunger that knows he's about done. It runs in our family. I thought I could beat it with this dry air. I came too late I guess. But think of dying in a dump like this." He forced a smile. "But I wanted to have a word with you."

"Why not come on up to the ranch. We have lots of room up there. This is no place for you."

"Thank you," Barney said quietly, smiling in a labored, cheerless way. "I'm well taken care of here. Toina sees to that. Queer girl, Toina. I think she's half-crazy, but she looks after me like a baby."

Again the strained, sad, brave smile.

"Thank you for the offer. But I haven't much breath, Mr. Standish. So I won't waste it running around the bush. You know, of course, about your brother?"

"Yes," said Norman, edging nearer, anxiously interested.

"I thought you did from the way you asked about Butler. Understand, Mr. Standish, I liked Bob Standish; and I haven't got a bit of use in the world for your uncle, Mr. Renalds."

He paused to see how this would be taken. It was taken in silence.

"You don't look much like Bob, but you are a mighty decent-looking fellow. Bob was full of life, never still. He could shoot and he would shoot, and they didn't make them, or enough of them, to scare him. And he stood up for the nesters just as long as they filed on land that was open. He said that his father, the colonel, had been nothing more than a nester in a big way."

"Go on," said Norman.

"Now I feel sorry for those poor —— myself, stuck out there on dry land, working like niggers to get a half-living and set up a home. And the way they drag by here, half the time walking by the wagon to save their horses! An' Reddin charges them for water. But that hasn't anything to do with it.

"There are a lot of liars in this country that old Reddin is all the time talking of as though it were a special paradise for such angels as himself——"

Norman smiled nervously.

"—and those liars are going to do a lot of talking to you. I've nothing to gain one way or the other. I'm about done. Anybody could shoot me, and it wouldn't be murder—I'm that near dead. But they say you haven't been out here since you were a child, and I saw how they wouldn't answer questions for you. I don't want to see them run in a cold deck on you. That family of Fraziers were burned out, and by cowboys. You seemed to want to know. I thought I'd tell you."

It was all that Barney could do to finish the last sentence before he broke into coughing again. Norman thought that the sick man would fall from weakness and the violence of his cough and took hold of him; but Barney leaned against the corral, gasping out that he was all right, that it was nothing more than usual.

"Who did it? Who burned them out?"

"I don't know. Some man that no one but Reddin seemed to know passed here about two hours ago, riding on north. He said he saw the flames yesterday. But this fellow, like everybody else in this —— country, wasn't mentioning names. But——"

Barney stopped, hesitating.

"Go on," said Norman.

"But when your uncle stopped here about a week ago on his way to Martinez, I overheard him tell Harvey that if the Fraziers weren't out in short order, he could look for another job. He said to Harvey that Allister was getting the nesters out down on the Santee. He said they were going to take this country up here, but that he wouldn't have them squatting down inside his fence—not till he was ready to quit running cattle on the Star Y range. I heard that."

"But Harvey couldn't have done it. He was in Martinez last night."

"Surely. I am only telling you what I know. Maybe your cowboys didn't do it. I don't know."

Norman did not reply. He looked away, trying to think. He could not think, for his thoughts were confused. His brother's name, Harvey, Renalds, the Fraziers, Allister, mingled together. One question became another before it was fully formed, and when he spoke it was to ask what he had not thought of asking—

"What kind of man was that Butler?"

Barney's mouth quivered into a thin, unpleasant smile.

"He never shaved and his beard never grew much. It just came out and curled up as if ashamed of itself. Back East he would have been a tramp. Out here they called him a bad man and let him talk as he pleased and push people out of his way because he carried two guns and had a mean scowl. But he was very particular who he picked on. The reason people think he killed your brother is because he would have done it if he could, and he disappeared about the same time Bob was murdered.

"I'll always believe that he was lying on the ground pretending to be hurt when he shot your brother. Right through the forehead it was. I've heard Fuzzy say that he would get him. At that I expect Red Allister paid him. Right here at Reddin's one night I saw Bob fold his arms and beg Fuzzy to start shooting—dared him, cursed him, then told him to get out. And Fuzzy went. He afterward explained that Bob knew both of his wrists had been sprained by a fall, but nobody believed that. He was a great boy, your brother, Mr. Standish."

"You don't think that my uncle——"

Norman stopped. He could not bring himself to ask the question again. The very thought that such a thing could be was revolting, too much so to be put coldly into words.

But Barney had caught the question, though it remained unasked.

"I don't know whether he had Bob killed or not, Mr. Standish. Everybody says that Black Renalds is a brave man, but I don't call it bravery to give Red Allister and Jim Harvey ten cows to brand as their own for every nester they make leave the country, and that's what he does! That's what's said, anyhow. And those poor —— have a hard enough time fighting this —— land without cowboys riding down on them."

Barney began another coughing spell, and when it was finished he staggered weakly away, his handkerchief to his mouth, his face covered with cold sweat.

XII

NORMAN presently returned to the barroom. He was in far from a pleasant mood, and had come to a decision.

Simmons was still at the bar, talking with Clara. Buckaroo and his friends lay as if their spines had been broken, but their eyes were watchful and on Simmons. Toina had gone.

Reddin, his pipe cold and in his hand, dozed with head thrown back and mouth open. His breathing rattled hoarsely.

"Simmons," Norman asked, "what brand is the double S?"

Buckaroo and his companions suddenly stiffened.

"McCullough's," said Simmons.

"There's a star-faced black out there——"

Buckaroo spoke across the room:

"Yeah. He was found wanderin' around about ten mile north o' here, an' some feller brought him in till somebody was goin' down Mac's way."

"There you go, talkin' again," said Simmons, giving him a slow, warning look.

"If that's the case," Norman replied, "I'll ride the black."

Reddin was wide awake:

"What's that? You can't take that there black, Mr. Standish. He's a plumb bad hoss. He killed two men——"

Simmons snorted in spite of himself, for he was not in a merry mood.

"What's the laugh about, Slim?" demanded Reddin, severely, arising heavily.

"Them bad hosses don't scare this boy none. He done topped off one this mornin' that killed them same two men the which you're speakin' about."

"If that's a McCullough stray, I'm going to take him," said Norman, looking from one face to another.

"Well you're not, anything of the kind!" cried one of Buckaroo's friends.

"Now what are *you* goin' say?" asked Simmons with pointed inquiry, taking a step forward.

"Well," the fellow began haltingly, "a friend o' mine picked up that stray, and he—McCullough owes him a bit o' money and he's going to have a settlement afore that hoss goes back. That's how it is."

The man concluded with a good deal of satisfaction in his tone, as if he had explained perfectly.

"I don't believe that," said Norman, not really meaning to call anybody a liar, but simply expressing himself.

"What! You call me a hoss thief!" cried the man, jumping up.

"Miss Clara," said Simmons, holding out his hand, "you'd better begin startin' a-distributin' of them six guns ag'in, 'cause it shore commences to sound like an argument."

"I need a good horse," Norman explained firmly. "I'll leave Blackie's horse here and pay for his keep till one of the Star Y men takes him in."

"Now it's this-a-way, Mr. Standish," said the asthmatic Reddin, signaling ponderously for silence toward Buckaroo's table. "There's a little misunderstandin' about this here hoss. I can't let him go because I've agreed to keep him——"

"If it's a McCullough stray you've no business keeping him."

Then every one was silent. The language was growing too plain. The next word from anybody might mean trouble.

Norman saw Barney looking through the doorway. Simmons in silence was buckling on his gun and tying the thongs low down on his leg. Clara, not in the least disturbed, waddled toward the other men, carrying their belts and firearms.

Simmons having inspected the chambers of his gun to see that they were filled, leaned against the bar and rested on his elbows—

"Son, you shore do start ——, don't you, whatever place you stop off?"

"I'm going to take that black!"

"Of course you are," said Simmons, looking about with eyes half-closed. "You ain't got no business takin' him. But if you want to take him, you take him—and that goes."

After this no one had anything to say.

Reddin wheezed the louder in his breathing and began to refill his pipe.

The buckaroos, getting on their guns, lounged back against the wall. Clara hurriedly went out of the room, but looked over her shoulder a time or two. The atmosphere was full of storm.

Barney came in as if nothing were going on. He sat at a table near the outside door, opened his cigar-box, took out a cigaret, lighted it, then idly began picking a fragment of a tune with his left hand on the banjo that lay on the table.

"Well son," asked Simmons, "you ready for to make a start?"

"Yes."

Norman walked ahead and without looking around went out of the door by which Barney was sitting; but Simmons was alert. He went out of the door backward, taking advantage of that position to wish everybody a "good day," as he bowed ironically.

"What's the matter with those fellows?" Norman asked, on the way to the corral. "Did they steal that horse?"

"I reckon as how they didn't quite steal 'im, seein' as how you are takin' him toward his home."

Norman stopped.

"Look here. If you knew that was a stolen horse, from a neighbor like McCullough—what's the range coming to, anyhow? Do you wink at horse-stealing these days?"

Simmons flushed under his leather-like tan; he said a little awkwardly:

"Mr. Standish, times has changed a heap. An' it don't pay to be too danged meddlesome. The Star Y she vents ever' brand she sells and sees that the man which buys her stock puts on some sort of registered mark so, when we-all see a hoss or cow with an old Star Y on its hide, we know something about what has happened. But a lot of the small ranchers just sell when they can, and nesters ain't no great hand to rebrand what they buy, so you can't always tell by the marks on a critter's hide what bill o' sale he's got behind him.

"O' course I saw that black an' knowed him for a grandson o' old Thunder hisself. An' I knowed that onct he belonged to McCullough; but I'm not ridin' for Mac, and I allow that I don't go getting inquisitive about other people's affairs. It ain't none too healthy, an' I'm a peaceable man."

"There something wrong about that horse——"

A thin, husky voice shrieked—

"Look out, Slim!"

At the same time a gun went off in Reddin's doorway, and Norman felt a twitch at his clothing as the bullet passed. Instantly a second shot struck the ground at Simmons' feet. There were cries, oaths, yells, mingled with a flurry of shooting, but not all the guns were going off inside of the house.

"In the back would they!" Simmons snarled, gun in hand, poised for a moment, waiting the sight of any man's head.

Then he ran for the house, bolting however through the kitchen, into the passageway, and so to the barroom door with Norman, empty-handed, at his heels.

Three men were down: One lay quietly, another writhed with hands to belly and cursed; the third was Barney; and, raised on one hand, face down, he was coughing violently. A nickel-plated revolver lay on the floor.

Buckaroo was leaning out of the door, gun in hand, sheltering himself and trying to see where Simmons and Norman had taken cover. Buckaroo's one uninjured companion stood beside him, also peering out, with gun ready.

"This way, skunks!" Simmons yelled.

And as they gave a startled leap, facing about, Simmons was shooting. Guns blazed. Smoke curled up and floated cloudlike against the low ceiling. There was a groping lurch of two falling bodies inward from the doorway.

"I guess that'll be about all," said Simmons grimly, holding his last shot and looking quickly about for some one who needed it.

Reddin, seeing that the battle was over, raised himself laboriously from the floor where he had fallen to be out of the way of flying bullets. His thick mouth was open like a fish that gasps for water, and he rubbed with both hands at a knee he had cracked in dropping down.

"But they've killed Barney!" Norman shouted and ran to where he had fallen, and was now down on his elbow, still coughing. Blood ran from Barney's chest and from his mouth.

Norman tried to lift him, but the body hung loose, and Barney pushed feebly to be let down. He did not speak, and there was no recognition in his eyes. He was past pain, too; and in a few minutes, dead.

Nobody appeared to know just what had happened. Reddin said that when he had just started for the bar to pour himself a little drink that he had heard a shot, and looked around. Buckaroo and his men had evidently planned that two of them should shoot together from the door and take Norman and Simmons in the back; and Barney, to whom no one paid attention, saw what was up, gave a warning cry, and opened fire with his nickel-plated revolver. And they got him; but not until he had put two of them down.

Reddin cursed Buckaroo, with an eager warmth congratulated Simmons and Norman, and swore he had never thought those fellows were that kind; but his congratulations were coolly received.

"I guess you an' me would be angels, son, but for that poor sick kid," said Simmons as he stood hat in hand, looking down at the thin, shrunken, white face. "Reddin's greasers, they can bury these skunks; but you an' me, son, we'll dig a little hole for our pardner, an' we'll dig it right out in front where people can see an' be respectful-like."

"Now, Slim," Reddin puffed, "not out front way—that wouldn't be proper, Slim. Think how it would look, Slim."

"Right out front," said Simmons. "An' ever' time I ride up, sudden-like, I don't want to see no foot tracks on it, nor chickens scratchin' there. There ain't nary man good enough to walk over this kid's grave—not while I'm on top o' dirt there ain't!"

So with pick and shovel they dug a grave under a cottonwood. Then without asking anybody's permission, Slim went into Barney's room, took a blanket, and when he had wrapped it around the dead boy, he carried the body to the grave and placed it down gently.

The two women stood by. All the kitchen help came out, and the old broken-down miner, long of beard, who did chores about the house. Reddin stood at the foot of the grave, breathing slow and noisily. Clara's face was wrinkled by sniffling, but Toina from time to time broke into bitter curses that were choked off by renewed sobbing.

"I hate you—you!" she screamed at Simmons. "If it hadn't been for you he wouldn't have been killed!"

When they had shaped the mound, smoothing it as well as the clods would permit, Norman and Simmons saddled up; and when they were saddled, Simmons carefully cleaned his gun and reloaded.

Reddin brought out to them some cans of tomatoes, sardines, a piece of cheese and a sack of crackers, that Simmons had bought and now stowed in his saddle-bags.

It was now after three o'clock.

"We'll be gittin' in mighty late an' be hungry afore we git even to the hay ranch," said Simmons.

They rode off. They climbed the far side of the basin. Both had ridden without speaking. There was enough for each to think about without sharing words. They came to the top of the basin and paused to look back.

From there on to the home ranch the nature of the country changed, slightly at first, with slow heave and fall of rise and flat, then into hills, with level valleys and mesas; but the hills grew, became broken, were full of gullies, little grassy basins, low mesas, and, at the mountains, turned into heaps of granite, like ruins—cosmic ruins that had been dumped on the earth.

Norman said—

"From here, which way lies Frazier's?"

Simmons pointed.

"Purty well southeast."

In that land of great distances, vague boundaries, obscure landmarks, Nature seemed to have compensated the vision by a clarity of atmosphere and a lack of obscuring foliage which enabled one to see in all directions for many miles. And Norman could now see here and there, far apart, the dotted homesteads of nesters; but these were mostly to the eastward. At that, he could not have counted more than three or four, and these miles apart; but when he had gone away from the country as a child there had been none, and Star Y cattle had run far out over the eastward range.

"Well," said Norman, "you can go on to the ranch if you like. I—I am going to Frazier's."

Simmons reined back sharply.

"Now what the ——? Ain't you had enough trouble for one day! You want to go an' git shot at again? Shore an' we couldn't git to Frazier's till way late, an' our reception, it would be some warm, I allow."

"You don't need to come."

"Ho—I don't need to come. You think you could go wanderin' off around this country by yourself in the dark an' git some place. You shore are one little trouble-hunter, you are. When did this here bright idee bump up ag'in' you?"

"That was why I wanted this black horse. I wanted to push on to Frazier's tonight."

"Now jest why are you so danged set on gettin' to them there Fraziers?"

"I want to know who burned them out. And the men that did it will have to get off the Standish range, and stay off."

Simmons turned far around in his saddle and stared at Norman as if he had not seen him before.

"You goin' start that thing too?"

"What thing?"

"Like your brother done. He stood up for them Fraziers. They jest naturally air stealin' the range right out from under your nose. Say, son, how old are you anyhow? Some times you seem jest a kid, an' ag'in you look like you was purty old."

Norman did not answer. He had felt very young, even younger than his age, when he left the train at Martinez. Now it did not matter. He knew that he was full grown. This range and ranch was his, and he meant to have his way.

They rode on hurriedly, and presently leaving the road, cut across the country, pushing forward rapidly.

XIII

THE black that Norman rode, grandson of the famous wild stallion, Thunder, that had roamed the range and could not be run down, walked down, nor trapped until he fell under Sawyer's crease-shot, had a smooth, easy, tireless gait, and kept his ears twitching alertly, noticing everything, swinging his head slightly from side to side and never pausing.

"Why, he knows he's going home!" said Norman.

"I wouldn't s'prized," said Simmons in a way which meant, "Why make such danged fool remarks about an intelligent hoss?"

Slim's small, tough bronco trotted with ears back sullenly, or dispiritedly adroop; only now and then pricking them forward as a jack-rabbit flashed ahead with side-wise bounds as if running on three legs.

Here and there were a few cattle, and if not too far off, Simmons changed his course and had a look at them. From a distance at which Norman could see nothing distinctive, Simmons would call the brand, tell who had branded them before and their present owner.

"Waal, if there ain't ol' Hook-You!" said Simmons, pointing at a speck dead ahead on the hillside. "That there cow is five or six year old and plumb some intelligent, a' real long-horn, the which we used to have down in the Nations. She goes where she dang well pleases an' by herself. She was branded on the range and all her calves air branded on the range as long as they run with her. She ain't never been in no round-up."

"Why not?"

Norman felt that Simmons was flourishing his imagination.

"Best ol' reason there is. She won't go. About three year back, when we was sweepin' this north country, I spied her full growed and no ear-mark, lying down behind a sage.

" 'Git up an' hustle,' I says, riding down on her with a whoop.

"She shore got up an' hustled some—right for me. Why, dang her soul, she had me and the hoss twistin' an' jumpin' sideways afore I could git my rope off. Then I throwed her good an' hard.

" 'Now,' says I, 'you are wiser than you was!'

"I give the rope slack an' shook it off. She got up an' jest stood there, a-lookin' at me.

" 'Be a-movin',' I says, speakin' harsh.

"That must a-hurt her feelin's, for she come a humpin.' She was shore on the prod. I throwed her ag'in. Why, I had to throw that there cow three times a-fore I got sense enough to let her alone.

"I was new in this country them days, an' when I spoke to Harvey about it, he had a grin as much as he ever grins, an' said that was one cow nobody ever bothered.

"But I shore bothered her. It hurt my feelin's to think a danged cow could be so high an' mighty. When we was through with that Spring round-up, I tied some stampin' irons to me an' went lookin' for her. An' we settled our little argument, me an' her. She's calved twict since then, an' both of 'em have been branded in the open, all by their little selves—an' myself, with her lyin' off to one side, hogtied. If all cows was like that there wouldn't be no cowpunchers. They'd all be punched off the range theirselves. She's worser'n a nester.

"Do you know much about brands, son?"

"Not much."

The Star of the Star Y was five short lines that converged at a point.

"Waal there was a feller come in here about two year ago and bought some head, maybe a hundred all tol', and he registered a six-spoke wagon-wheel and an X. In a year that feller had three or four hundred head, an' was gittin' on fast. But the pore feller he took sick an' died of a-sudden."

"What was the matter?"

"Somethin' went wrong of his throat."

"I see," said Norman, slowly.

"Yeah. Curious, weren't it, that if you was to put a rim on the Star an' give the wagon-wheel another spoke and the Y another leg you'd have a wagon-wheel X? Your uncle caught him an' another man doin' jest that, an' for some time I guess the air it was full of bullets. Leastwise one man he run into some, an' the other feller he rode off; but some boys from the Star Y caught up with him in a day or two. The pore feller he didn't have no heirs, leastwise not that cared to come forward jest then, so his herd was sold and the money give to the Cattlemen's Association for to fight rustlers, though I allow your uncle don't need much help. He shore is one fine cowman. He shore is."

The sun sank low. A coyote yelled like a child-murderer, dropping unrepentant hellward. Evening shadows, as if rising from the ground, floated upward against the mountain sides, overspread the hills dotted with mesquite and sage, blotted the small valleys, laid deep, black streaks along the arroyos.

"Let's eat," said Simmons, pulling up and dropping his reins as he swung from the saddle. "But we'd better put a rope on that McCullough hoss. He may have notions—an' nothin' this side o' that string them rustlers made off with could catch him."

The men sat on their haunches, each with an opened can of tomatoes, from which he drank, on the ground before him. They ate cheese, crackers, sardines, washing it down with tomatoes. They had no spoons, no forks, nothing but pocket-knives and a can-opener. When finished, they wiped their fingers on dead buffalo-grass, rolled cigarets, mounted, and went on.

Darkness, when the sun was barely out of sight, came with a rush that confused the landscape. Hills floated mistily, as if suddenly melting into a dark liquid that sought its level. A coyote began yelping, and was answered from afar. But in a few minutes this sun-down darkness seemed to thin as when a mist clears. The night was cloudless.

Stars began the dance of their shining multitudes. A chill came through the air.

An hour after sundown Simmons said—

"There's our fence."

Norman peered ahead but could see nothing. They were not within a quarter of a mile of the fence, but Simmons, by the rangeman's sixth sense, had known when they were near.

"We are nearly up to Frazier's then?"

"Right some smart ways yit. This here fence of yourn is only about thirty-mile square."

"Of mine?"

"I allow it's all yourn now, ain't it? We call this the Little Pasture. Your uncle's got one down on the 44 Circle range that is the big one. It's only fenced on two sides as yit. The nesters keep cuttin' in an' out of it. The 44 and the Star Y air jest about one outfit now, as you all know."

Norman did not know anything of the kind, but he said nothing.

"You could set this little barnyard down in one corner o' that other range without anybody ever noticin' something new had come. It's down in the Santee country that the cowmen air shore goin' to make a stand agin the nesters. Up here they're beginnin' to git ever'thing their own way. It's that hay ranch of the old colonel's that's done it."

They dismounted at the fence. It was made of two strands of barbed wire. At wide distances strong posts had been set in the ground. Between these were other posts, smaller, touching, but not set into, the ground; but these shorter posts kept the wires from sagging.

"The Fraziers, they've got a fence of their own around their hay patch. We ca'calate they borrowed some o' ourn to make it with."

Simmons took a pair of heavy pliers from his saddle bag, dismounted, found a solid post, jerked out the staples and held the wires to the ground with his feet while the horses were led across the fence. Then he pounded in new staples with the head of his pliers.

They mounted and rode on.

"It's about four mile," said Simmons.

"How did they happen to squat down inside of a fence?"

"There weren't no fence here then, but it was Star Y range jest the same. Out o' all the land that was layin' loose they picked this spot an' called it Home Sweet Home. A hundred miles one way or t'other wouldn't have meant nothin' to them, but no sir, they throwed off their beddin' right here an' stuck."

Norman had known that it was a great, wide country into which, as the Westerners had a way of saying, whole Eastern States could be dropped without covering more than a few prairie-dog holes; but he had never before realized just how extensive was this land. As a child he had been too immature to understand its vastness. Now he felt a little bewildered in trying to visualize what its enormous areas meant. In the old days the Standish range had been larger than a European empire; now it covered more territory than many a nation owned.

XIV

A DOG began to bark furiously.

"Whoa!" said Simmons. "We'd better go slow an' sing out. These Fraziers air likely to be powerful skittish about strangers on hoss back, night time specially. Hi-oo there! Anybody round?"

Norman could see vaguely in the starlight the dim outline of a wagon; and he was aware of quick vague movements about this wagon. The dog barked crazily. Low excited voices were heard; then the sharp sound of stumbling feet and breaking twigs as somebody scurried off on the run.

"That's Frazier or his kid goin' into the bushes with a Winchester. An' when you start talkin', son, you'd better talk convincin'."

"Who's you all?" shouted a man's voice from near the wagon.

"I'm Standish of the Star Y. I want to see Mr. Frazier—or Wally!"

Pause. Then the low clicking of hurried voices, from which the man's rose in a loud call—

"Who'd you say you was?"

"Standish. Norman Standish. Wally knows me—he helped me yesterday with my baggage."

A moment's silence; then a woman's shrill warning:

"Look out, paw—don't believe 'im! It's a trick!"

"Who's with you?" came Frazier's slow voice, dangerous with doubt.

"There are only two of us. Somebody had to show me how to find the place."

Again silence; then the woman called shrilly—

"Is this here that dude stranger you was tellin' about?"

"Dunno—sounds a little like 'im," Wally answered from a distance, off to one side. "What you want, stranger?"

"We are coming up," said Norman, touching the spurs to his horse.

"Be keerful, paw—be keerful. Don't trust 'em!" the woman warned ominously.

"Are you Bob Standish's brother?" called Wally.

"Yes."

"I think you're lyin'," Wally answered with a grumbling inflection.

"All right, stranger," said Frazier. "Ride up—ride up an' say your say. But we ain't a-goin' a-git off this land!"

Norman rode up and dismounted. Simmons followed, but stayed in his saddle. The dog jumped about, forward and back, yapping fiercely.

The family had made down its bed under the wagon. A small girlish face peered up from between the wheels, half-fearful, but greatly curious.

Mr. Frazier, in boots, trousers and undershirt, stood near the back of the wagon, a rifle across his body, ready to shoot; and by him was a tall, dried-out woman in a loose wrapper, with her hair down.

They eyed Norman with staring fierceness.

"Mr. Frazier, I just heard at Reddin's that you had been burned out, and I rode over to find out who did it."

"You ort a-know! Don't try to come that innercent racket over us," said the woman.

"Aw maw, be still," said Wally, who had come in near the wagon. "Jess, git back under that wagon!"

The girl, who had begun to creep out, drew back.

"You have filed on this land, Mr. Frazier?"

"Yes, we have filed on this land," stormed the woman, "an' we ain't goin' git off. You can't git us off! Jest you try some more. There's our house, all burnt, an' our hay ruint. If there was ary law in this country you all'd have to pay an'——"

"Aw, maw, let somebody else talk a little," said Wally.

"If you have filed, there is no need to get off. You stay. I'll see that you are repaid for all the damage that has been done. Now I want to know who did it?"

No one spoke. Of those who heard, only Simmons, and perhaps the girl peering from under the wagon, could readily believe him.

"You are really Norm Standish?" demanded Wally in a voice that was highly skeptical.

"Yes."

"Then why the thunderation didn't you say so there in town when I was shootin' off my mouth?"

"I wanted to learn all you had to say."

"I shore said a heap," Wally answered sheepishly; then, abruptly, fiercely, "But I didn't tell you nothin' that weren't fact!"

Maw Frazier had come closer and was peering intently into Norman's face.

"You ain't nothin' like Bob in looks—he was the best lookin' man I ever seen, an' the finest boy, 'cept Wally here, I ever knowed. Many's the time he's rode up here an' et dinner. There never was a finer boy than Bob Standish, an' ever'body thought so, 'cept Black Renalds and that rattlesnake of a Red Allister. Ever' man old Renalds has got ridin' for him ought to be hung if there was any justice in this here country, which there ain't——"

"Maw now, you shet up," Wally begged. "That ain't no way to talk *now*. Ain't Mr. Standish here said he'd help us?"

"You jest let me alone, Wally Frazier. I'll say my say whenever I please, an' jest because this young man looks like he had some sense an' honesty, I'm goin' tell him of the goin's on in this here country!"

And nothing could stop her. Wally might break in with half-affectionate blustering, telling her to stop; and Jess might beg, "Oh maw, don't!" and Mr. Frazier might reprovingly say, "Now maw—now maw!" while Simmons twisted about in his saddle and pretended not to listen; but she went on at a breathless angry clip, turning from one subject to another, pouring out the words, denouncing Renalds in one breath and talking of her girlhood in Kansas in another, tumbling facts headlong and all mixed together.

In ten minutes there wasn't hardly anything pertaining to the Fraziers, the Star Y, the country, his uncle or his brother, that Norman needed to ask questions about.

She told him that she had been born in a Kansas dugout; that when she was fifteen, outlaws had killed her father and tried to break into the dugout where her mother, herself and two sisters were, but they had given up the attack after her mother shot one of the men; the rest of the gang then drove off all the stock.

She had married Frazier when she was seventeen and moved to the next county and started farming. Cowmen fought them, but they wouldn't budge. Then in a few years that country began to settle; and there was killings and such goin's-on as no Christian woman could stand.

They heard about plenty of good land farther west, so they started. They settled down in another place, but after a few years the country wasn't what they wanted; so they joined up with another neighbor or two and started out. Outlaws held them up—this was in Texas—robbed them of money, good horses, and food. They had to squat down at the nearest water and try to make a home because they couldn't travel with their horses gone.

A sick man came along one day with a good outfit and a little girl. He said he knew that he was going to die, and if his little Jess was left in good hands, he wouldn't care. He stayed with them six months and died. Then they took his outfit and moved on. They stopped again and tried to break the land; but water was too scarce. They stuck it out two or three years, then heard about the good water and easy wells up in this country. So they came.

They had settled down far off from everybody, but they had no sooner started to break the land than Black Renalds sent men to tell them to move! Move! Never. They wouldn't move.

They would have all been killed, she said, but for Bob Standish who told old Renalds—the black, ugly old rascal!—that if the Fraziers were burned out he, Bob, would burn the Star Y ranch house! Renalds was an old thief who wanted to put a fence around everything from the Santee River to Martinez. He was stealin' Star Y cows right and left, himself. Why, the herds had dwindled down in the past four years, but the 44 Circle was increasing its herds. And he was using the Star Y hay ranch to winter feed his own cows! Renalds was encouraging rustlers to steal from nesters.

Renalds and Red Allister, she said, put Fuzzy Butler up to killing Bob. Mrs. Frazier said that she wouldn't put anything past Black Renalds. He'd turn his own mother out to grass in a blizzard!

And wasn't it just the last time that she had seen Bob Standish—must not have been more than a week before he was killed (she said "kilt")—that he had said when she was warning him to look out for Red Allister and Renalds—for people had been shooting at Bob in the dark—he had said:

"Maw Frazier, don't you go weepin' too much if you hear about anybody killin' me. You just wait and see if I don't walk in on you, hungry as a wolf. Tears like the rest o' the water in this country are too precious to waste."

"Then," she concluded, "he rode off laughin'—such a one as he was to cut up! —and the next time I hear, he is sure enough kilt. They was shootin' at him. They used to lay over there by McCullough's, knowin' he would go to see Kate."

It now appeared for a moment that she had finished; but not so:

"Yesterday paw and Wally was to town, an' along jest about sun-down Jess yells, 'Oh maw, there's a stampede!' 'Stampede your foot,' I tells her, 'there ain't enough cows in this big pasture to have a stampede, an' what'd they be stampedin' about on a quiet day?' 'Oh come!' says Jess, with me a-bakin' bread 'cause paw likes his salt-risin,' an' I allus try to have some good an' warm when he comes from town.

"I rushed out, and shore enough there was a bunch of cows a-coming. I grabbed the rifle from beside the door an' run. They was comin' straight for our alfalfer patch, an' that fence we got there I knowed wouldn't be worth nothin' if they hit it full tilt. I run down toward the patch a-yellin' an' a-shootin'—then I saw they was bein' drove on purpose! There was a bunch of cowboys right on their tails. An' I knowed it had come. I got down on my knee an' I started shootin'. There I was, away off from the house, an' them cows went through our fence, through our garden, and I was almost runned over an' made into a grease spot.

"Them cowboys swung up around to the house, threw matches into the barn, then pitchforked burning hay into the house. Then they jumped on their hosses and rode off, an' I didn't have no more carteridges with me. I don't know all the rascals in this country an' I never seed them before as I know of.

"Me an' Jess come a-runnin' an' worked the pump, but we might as well a-spit on the fire. Then me an' Jess jumped into the house an' throwed out some beddin', but that was all we could git out.

"When paw and Wally come in along about mornin' time, there wasn't nothin' but ashes.

"But I said—paw, you mind what I said?—I said, 'Paw, now they've made us love this ol' place more 'n ever, an' we'll starve first, right *here!*'

"That's what I said. I said: 'Paw, you an' Wally go over to the river in a day or two an' git some cottonwoods, an' we'll make a dugout. I was born in a dugout, an' these Renaldses ain't no worser 'n the Indians an' outlaws was back in Kansas when I was a girl.' And paw he says, 'All right.' Didn't you, paw?"

"I guess a snack would taste right smart good to these here gentlemen," said Frazier.

And maw, having said her "say" to the fullest, became eager with hospitality. Norman and Simmons protested that they had eaten, but it did no good.

Maw Frazier slipped into her shoes, and with a pile of mesquite that Wally had cut for their cooking fire, started right in to heat water for coffee. Jessie got out the bacon and began slicing it into a heavy, iron frying-pan. Most of their utensils were of iron and burning the house down had not injured them. Frazier and Wally had brought out a load of provisions in the wagon, so they weren't likely to starve, as maw said, for some little time yet.

Maw talked as she bustled about. She was, quite naturally, greatly excited over the nester trouble. She said they had been thinking some of pulling up and moving over south nearer McCullough's. The Jacksons had come in over there. She had known the Jacksons back in Kansas. But now they wouldn't move. No. Nothing could make them move.

She was gaunt and homely and worn, her thin face seemed hard as a hatchet, her tone was sharp and she usually talked at the top of her voice. Her loose hair flew as she bustled about. She had in her the strength and courage of a plainswoman, afraid of nothing and with mysterious passion devoted to the dry hard land; in her, Norman saw the typical mother of the pioneer plowman, the mother of the men that were to crowd the cowboy from the face of the earth.

But it was at Jess that Norman glanced repeatedly. The girl was on her knees, holding the bacon firmly in the frying-pan as she sliced it; and the slices were very uneven for she kept looking toward Norman and did not carefully watch what she was doing.

Wally lighted the lantern, which had been with the wagon, and so saved from the fire; then he began pawing about in the bedding. When he emerged from under the wagon he had a quilt and a blanket.

"These here'll keep the night chill off," he said, dropping them by Norman.

"We weren't staying the night."

"We'll be ridin' soon," said Simmons. "We can make the hay ranch an' bed down there."

"Ridin' my foot," maw answered. "You all are goin' to stay right here an' have breakfast."

"All right," said Norman, who was tired.

Also he had his gaze on the girl who knelt at the fire, her face half-turned from the heat as she held the frying-pan, now and then turning the bacon with a fork. She was very pretty in the firelight.

XV

THE next day Norman and Simmons went on; and during the ride Simmons was as uncommunicative as a mummy. He had nothing to say. A faint grunt now and then was the most that Norman could get out of him.

Great fields of green, dotted with brown mounds, appeared on the landscape at first suggestive of a miracle in a desert.

For an hour they followed the road beside a strong four-strand, barbed-wire fence, every post of it solidly in the ground, that enclosed one of these patches of paradise from the cattle that fed on the more barren ground all about.

This hay ranch was twenty miles from the home ranch, and as much apart from it as farmers are from cattlemen. The employes of the one had little to say to the contemptuous horsemen of the other.

In the Winter great droves of cattle were turned into these strongly-wired fields. The haystacks were also enclosed with fences, and every day, even in the midst of snow, men loaded enormous hayricks and drove along, pitchforking the hay to each side of the wagon, while the cattle strung out in rows, feeding and following.

Colonel Standish had begun experimenting with alfalfa after a hard Winter had given him severe losses; and finding a dam at hand, and having the luck to get artesian water as well, he had enlarged the alfalfa fields until thousands of acres held the miraculous roots that slumbered through the Winter and yielded four crops to the mowers between Spring and frost.

The colonel had been a man of reckless visions, and did every thing on a superlatively large and often wasteful scale. He had pride in sheer vastness of possession. But he had made money off the alfalfa, for having plenty of Winter feed for his immense herds, he was able to ship to the markets in the Springtime when beef was always up.

But though it was proved beyond all question that the alfalfa land was invaluable to the cattle, preventing hard Winter losses, producing a heavier beef that swelled the market profits, the cowboys regarded this "grangering" with contempt. And the cowboys that were out of work during the Winter could not be hired to drive a hay-wagon, though some of them did fall so low as to ride fence. That, at least, was horseback work.

"You know, Slim," said Norman, gazing at the dotted forms of men running mowers, windrow-rakes, go-devils, stackers, getting in the third crop, "you know that we are nothing but nesters in a big way."

Simmons grunted, full of disgust. He waved a long arm from horizon to horizon.

"Folks tell me that once the Star Y range run a hundred mile east from the mountains, and the hills were full of the cattle, the plains out there thick with 'em. Now you're crowded plumb up agin the mountains. An' what done it? That danged hay ranch! The news spread that this here was rich country, with water. Now you can't even have a little thirty-mile fence all your own. Nesters squat down inside o' that—an' you urge 'em to stay! You ain't the feller I thought you was."

Norman did not answer.

Shortly before noon they rode into the barnyard of the hay ranch. The barn boss hurried out, respectfully speaking to Simmons, who answered friendly enough but with no familiarity.

"I'll feed an' water your hosses," said the barn boss, eying the McCullough black and looking inquiringly toward Norman.

The bunk-house was a large one-story wooden building, with no furnishings but wall-bunks, a table, a stove and a few chairs. The foreman's quarter's were at one end, a separate room. The dining-room, a building apart, was at the other.

They washed up at a bench outside the bunk-house and went into the dining-room, filled with two rows of long tables and benches.

The cook, a Swiss with flowing mustache, in undershirt and apron, poked his head from the kitchen, but relaxed his scowl at the sight of Simmons and shouted agreeably—

"Hello."

"This here is Mr. Standish," said Simmons. "Bob's brother. He's come to take charge—of ever'thing!"

Norman reddened.

"Well, ain't you?" demanded Simmons in an undertone. " 'Pears like it to me. Besides this feller al'us keeps his toughest steaks till some cowman drops in for grub."

The cook bustled about noisily and soon had thick, steaming steaks, that were not tough, and fried potatoes, canned corn, coffee and bread before them.

"Best meal you ever cooked—for a cow-puncher," said Simmons, patronizingly, when they had finished.

The cook ignored the inference, being occupied in staring at Norman.

"Let's be ridin,' " said Simmons. "Them farmhands'll be in here in a minute."

The sweat-stained farm hands were coming in for their dinner. Some rode in from the fields on the harnessed work-horses, others sat on the wagons that took them to and from the fields. The foreman came on his saddle-horse, which went straight to the barn when the foreman dismounted at the bunk-house. There was clatter and click of harness as the horses hurried eagerly to the barn and, with bridles off, dipped their noses into the water trough, then turned and made for their stalls where grain had been measured out by the barn boss.

Norman was introduced to Robertson, the foreman, a rather short, quiet, uneducated man who all day long did nothing in the field but ride about, stand about, sit about, chewing tobacco, silent and watchful. He was a good foreman.

As Simmons and Norman rode away they passed a wide field where here and there men stood in rubber boots, motionlessly leaning on long shovels, watching the ditch water spread over the fields.

"Now that's what this country's comin' to," said Simmons. "Here where men has rode ——bent-for-leather, these water rats go to sleep on their shovels. It's seein' an' hearin' about all this alfalfa an' artesian water, an' dams an' ditches, that's stirred the nesters to drift this way. They never would a-come but for this——"

Simmons waved a contemptuous hand at the broad fields.

"Why, dang it, Mr. Standish, if this here was my ranch, I'd round up ever' cow for three hundred mile an' stampede 'em on to them alfalfa patches an' wipe 'em out, the same as may happen to some nesters afore long. This here is cow country, an' it ain't cattle raisin' to feed 'em an' nuss 'em like they was pasture raised back East."

"My father always said that nesters would take the country. After he found there was water underground, he said that. He did not feel resentful. He said it was change that had to be made in building up the country, and that the only thing the cattlemen could do was to prepare for the change, to look ahead and choose their land first."

"Waal, your uncle ain't got no such notions, the which is shameful in a growed man. You listen to him, son. He knows this country an' cattle. An' it was a woman that passed them remarks about your uncle puttin' Fuzzy Butler up to that killin' or I'd a-been talkin' back in language you don't need no interp'eter to savvy. I shore would. Besides, nobody don't know it was Fuzzy what done that killin.' Personal, I don't see where Fuzzy ever got the courage to stand face to face with Bob like he'd a-had to do to put that hole in his forehead. An' Fuzzy he done a wise thing in lightin' out—if he done it.

"Son, you jest remember what Slim Simmons is a-saying now, the which is that Black Renalds never put nobody up to killin' anybody. Mr. Renalds, he does his own shootin.' Like that rustler I was tellin' of you about. Mr. Renalds he was ridin' out by hisself for weeks, off an' on, layin' to catch that feller. Don't you go a-believin' what Maw Frazier an' them nesters tell you."

"You don't think it could have been my uncle himself that did it?" asked Norman, uneasily.

"Him an' Bob had some awful hard words at times. But Renalds, he never done *that*. Besides, there weren't no man in this country, son, that could shoot faster nor straighter than Bob Standish. He wore out holsters jest practicin' the draw, and the powder he burned up keepin' his hand in was a wonder. You can't be no good man with a gun unless you keep a-shootin.'

"In some ways Bob he didn't have a lick of sense, but he was powerful well liked by the Star Y fellers. An' your uncle he must a-liked Bob hisself, 'cause he put up with more from him than ary other man would have done, an' Renalds he ain't a great hand to stand for foolin' from anybody. They can all say what they want about him, but me—I like workin' for Renalds. He is shore a cowman."

After that Simmons again became silent, except for grunts, the loudest of which came at some remark about the strange beauty of the Frazier girl. Thereupon Norman too became silent.

XVI

AS THEY approached the Standish home ranch, Norman saw that there had been changes, not many, but there was a large, a very large corral where the herd was held for branding—another sign that the range had been lessened until the country close to the home grounds was about the most important part of the round-up.

The trees were much taller than he remembered them. There were a few new outbuildings, a larger barn, as well as the old one which in his mind was always associated with the whipping he and Bob had received.

In sight of the house they were met by two cowboys who, though in a hurry, reined up for a moment.

"Them rustlers got off with a big bunch night a-fore last, Slim. We seen tracks up the cañon. Harvey he got back in here last night, and he's put men to ridin' out there with rifles under their legs."

"Yeah," shouted his companion gleefully, "an' we hear there's been two fires down Santee way, 'sides the one we had up this here way. Them nesters are on the move, shore!"

"By the way," said the first cowboy, who apparently had not noticed Norman's horse though he had looked keenly at Norman himself, "that young Bud Russell what works for McCullough is up to the place there now, a-r'arin' about some hosses Mac has lost."

"An," said the other, "he don't 'pear to allow that the same rustlers what are botherin' us would molest Mac any."

With that they gave a whoop, flashed their spurs at the horses' flanks and were instantly gone, pounding the road with a flurry of hoofs.

That was the second time that Norman had heard Bud Russell's name. It had a vaguely familiar sound.

"Who is Bud Russell, Slim?"

"He were your brother's side pardner. He can ride and he can shoot, an' he ain't got no sense a-tall."

As they rode up toward the barn they saw a group of men at the round corral. Some were sitting on the top rail, hunched over, smoking, watching inside. Through the cracks of the corral Norman could see flashing glimpses of movement, and now and then a rider's head, bobbing drunkenly, shot into view above the rails as the bucking horse leaped upwards. Other men, uninterested in the pitching, squatted in a circle beside the coral, smoking, whittling straws, idly stabbing the ground with pocket knives. One of these was Buck Blevins. Another was young Bud Russell, a dark, straight-eyed boy, with recklessness glimmering on his face.

As Simmons and Norman reined up a few of the men rose, others merely lifted their eyes. No one spoke other than a strained greeting to Simmons, and all gazed at Norman.

"Stranger," said young Russell, straightening up, speaking easily, pretending that he did not know who Norman was, "that's a right good hoss you are on."

Norman sensed that there was trouble in the air; he answered:

"I am not a stranger. And if this is a good horse, it is because he wears a vented Star Y."

Some of the men grinned and shifted their eyes toward Russell.

"Shore an' you 'pear like a stranger to me. But I hear tell that Bob Standish has a half-brother what looks like a sick calf in Winter time—so you must be him!"

"Look out, Bud, that he don't wallop you with a cane!" said one of the men, casting his eyes toward Buck, who sullenly eyed the ground.

"Now I reckon that'll be about all you'll contribute to this here conversation," said Simmons, fastening his gaze on the man.

No one spoke for a time. Every one knew that Bud Russell had been Bob Standish's closest friend, and so understood his grudge against this pet tenderfoot who was generally supposed to be party to the scheme of beating Bob out of his share in the ranch.

Then Russell said:

"I reckon as how if you'll take off that thing you 'pear to have been usin' as a saddle I'll put a rope on Star Face an' take him off home with me. In this man's country, stranger, it don't look well to be settin' on a hoss that has been stole."

Then Simmons, leisurely hooking a knee around the horn of his saddle, rolled a cigaret and told something of what had happened at Reddin's.

"And what's more," concluded Simmons, putting his foot back in the stirrup, and wilfully destroying the good opinion he had almost built up among the men for Norman, "we stopped the night over to them Fraziers. 'Pears like somebody rode over on them nesters an' sorta scorched things a little. Mr. Standish here he tells 'em to stay squatted jest where they air, and that the Star Y'll build 'em a new house, 'cause good neighbors with purty girls ain't none too plentiful around here. Let's be ridin'!"

With that Simmons' horse leaped away and tore over the hundred yards to the barn as if running for its life. Star Face followed with impatient bounds at being outdistanced.

"Why did you say that, in just that way?" demanded Norman hotly as they dismounted.

"I tol' 'em facts. An' I shore wanted to give them hombres something to talk about, an' they'll talk like a lot of prairie-dogs after a shower."

"Slim, I don't want you or any other man to link my name with Jess Frazier's again. She is a pretty girl, but she is only a child. And she has nothing at all to do with the fact that I am going to see that the Fraziers are repaid for their loss."

"Go on an' git all het up. It ain't

troublin' me none. She may be only a child, but she's a woman, an' one man I know is already in love with her."

Norman flushed. He was boiling with anger, but against that manner of lazy unconcern he could do nothing. He forcibly changed the subject, asking pointedly something he had been thinking about—

"You said this morning that you admired my uncle—but what about Red Allister?"

Simmons hitched up his belt, reached for tobacco, creased a paper, filled it, smoothed the tobacco, then stopping with the cigaret on the way to his lips, said—

"I reckon as how he's a cross between a skunk an' a rattlesnake."

"And he is my uncle's right-hand man. How do you account for that?"

"In a way o' speakin', yes. But I don't account for it a-tall. Nobody as I know of does. Your uncle has a way o' puttin' a man in charge an' he lets that man alone. I don't care how many nesters Allister burns out or shoots. This is war, son. But as a man, Allister ain't even a man's shadder. I'll tell you right out, that if it was me guessin', I'd say Allister had Bob killed. Fuzzy he was an Allister man. An' you'd better believe that Fuzzy Butler wouldn't go twenty feet around these here parts without bein' killed a dozen times if any o' them fellers they call Harvey's men happened to see him.

"We all liked your brother. He had some wrong idees, same as you've got—only not so bad. But the remarks he made behind a feller's back was usual quite some bit milder than he made to a feller's face."

"But if Allister——"

"Now don't ever ask me no more questions, Mr. Standish. I ain't usual so talkative. An' I said more now than I ort. I'll be frank, 'cause I'm thinkin' o' goin' back to the Nations where nesters ain't encouraged over much. An' you ain't no real cowman, Mr. Standish. You are nice feller with more good stuff in you than 'pears at first sight, an' I could think a powerful lot of you if you didn't have such wrong idees. But you ain't no cowman. You belong over on the hay ranch!"

Simmons took the horses and walked away while Norman looked doubtfully after him, not quite sure whether the cowboy had meant what he said, or was drubbing it in because of the nesters.

Norman walked up toward the ranch house, about a half-mile off. Things familiar in childhood came back to him with a rush, full of associations, unremembered objects now evoking half-forgotten incidents. He passed near the cowboys' bunk house—a low building of adobe, built long before lumber was easily got. In the old days there had been a veritable army of cowboys about the place, young, strong, merry, reckless fellows.

However, there was but little pleasure in his return. The grounds and buildings and country was much the same, but the atmosphere was changed. He felt lonely and depressed.

As he neared the house, dogs streamed out, barking wrathfully. They appeared to know him for a stranger, to know that he was some one who did not belong on a cow ranch.

An old Mexican with a sash about his waist appeared, scolded the dogs and bowed low to Norman, telling him softly that Mr. Renalds was away.

"I know that, Murieta," said Norman. "But I thought I would stop a while anyhow."

The old Mexican gazed in astonished perplexity, then almost pounced at him, crying out that it was the young señor, welcoming him with eager, almost pathetic, humbleness.

Norman entered the great, gloomy, rambling house, low of ceiling, in many rooms thick of wall, and dimly lighted even on bright days. Murieta followed eagerly at his side.

Norman looked about for a time, going from room to room. It was astonishing how little had been changed. It was as though he had gone outdoors, grown up suddenly, and returned. The piano still stood where his mother had found it when she came as a bride into the gloomy house. Colonel Standish's books appeared not to have been touched; and his picture as a young cavalry officer hung in a gilt frame on the wall: a fine, strong, prematurely stern face. Norman gazed at it with reflective pride, not unmixed with humiliation: at his age, twenty-two, his father had emerged from the Civil War, a major.

Murieta slipped away noiselessly.

It appeared to Norman that the same Indian rugs were at the same places on the floor. Curios and old guns, the colonel's sword, hung about the walls, as he had remembered them.

Norman sat down on a broad, soft, swinging divan, fastened by chains to rafters, before the great fireplace, now empty of even ashes, and looked about moodily.

Soon he began to hear the sound of voices, a perfect babbling of soft, excited tones, the shuffle of feet, a baby's sharp crying.

Murieta came in with many bows and said that his wife, Angela, and old Ramon, and Felicita, with a new baby, and old Antonio, and others, many others, were in the *patio*, praying for a chance to speak with the young señor, whom they remembered, and his wonderful mother—and ah! the magnificent colonel.

"Everything it has changed, *sí señor*," said the old man gravely.

In the Standish home the house servants had always been Mexicans. Some of them had been born there, grown up there, died there. They lived on the fat of the land, taking what they needed, having all they could eat and getting wages too, gardening a little for themselves, chiefly to get the long strings of peppers that were hung against the south walls of their houses until from a distance it appeared that the walls were painted a bright red. In return they did all the work about the house, fed the chickens, dogs, pigs, ate the fruit, and served in a sort of indolent blissful bondage. Occasionally one of the Mexican boys became a cowboy, and was invariably a good roper.

"I think a fire would be pleasant this evening," said Norman, waving a hand toward the fireplace as he arose and followed Murieta to those who waited to welcome him.

There seemed a score of them, mostly children, wide-eyed and shy.

Angela, now very aged, who had put the swaddling-clothes on him, wept happily, holding his arm, patting his back, reaching for his cheek with withered lips.

"And your mother, the dear *señora?*"

"I am without a mother now, Angela."

Thereupon the old woman began to wail passionately, and Felicita's new fat baby began to squall as if also in sorrow.

There was an excited babble of soft voices, during which old Ramon and Murieta scolded severely and urged them away.

Norman returned within the house. The crying of the baby had made him remember Mrs. Welch's little starvelings. Here was wasted a dozen gallons a day of good rich milk. There was starvation; it was nothing else.

He again sat down on the divan, moodily letting his thoughts drift.

Murieta came in with two young stalwart boys who brought kindling, then went out and returned with a big log. The old major-domo spoke sharply over the way they were arranging the wood for the fire, and called heaven to witness that the young men of this day were growing more and more worthless. When the fire-wood was arranged to his satisfaction he struck the match, gently broke off splinters to aid the flame, and when it was blazing, bowed and went out.

It was still light outside, and warm; but the fire cheered the great, gloomy room, which never felt warm except on cold days.

XVII

SO NORMAN was presently disturbed by the scraping jingle of spurs and the peg-like click of heels.

He looked up, waiting; and Bud Russell appeared in the doorway:

"Mr. Standish, I come to have a little talk."

"What is it?" Norman asked coldly.

"Well, I got some pologies to make. That is, if you want 'em."

"They will be very acceptable," said Norman, without warmth.

"Slim he come back up there to the corral, and I've been hearin' what Slim said about you, an' Slim's a hard hombre. When he speaks well of a man that man's got to have somethin' more than two legs an' a pair of arms. And McCullough—I'm workin' for Mac—*has* had a lot of hosses stole, an' the fellers around here ain't none too over anxious about lendin' us a hand to get 'em back. That's why I spoke sorta as I did."

"Yes, I understand. I am glad to have the explanation."

"Well you don't think I'd a-come all the way up here just to 'pologize about *that*, do you?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about you, Russell. I have a vague remembrance of a Russell that had a ranch somewhere——"

"That was my dad. He's dead. Your uncle an' Red Allister bought a few of our cows an' stole the rest——"

Norman stood up quickly.

"Now jest don't get excited," said Bud Russell with a half-grin. "I'm not tellin' you anything ever'body don't know. Your uncle claimed dad owed him money. Maybe there was somethin' in that, but he shore took all our cows. An' I'm goin' tell you a lot more. That's why I come."

"Very well"—Norman looked at his watch—"I haven't much time."

He would really have liked to be friendly toward this young fellow, who had been his brother's best friend; but Russell had greatly irritated him, and continued to irritate him with his almost insolent ease.

"Well, I think as how I'll set down anyway. I don't talk good standin' up. Sorta bothers me like. An' I slipped up here to have a talk while the fellers down there are teasin' Buck about you cuttin' him out with that there Frazier girl."

Norman felt explosive, but remained silent.

Bud Russell pulled a heavy chair near the front of the swinging divan and sat down, throwing his hat and gloves to the floor.

"I'm the closest friend your brother ever had. You ask anybody. I never had any use for you, seein' as how Bob was bein' treated by your uncle. But Bob always said you was a good kid, an' with half a chanct you'd be a man."

Norman alternately flushed and paled under such frankness; then he interrupted coldly—

"If you were such a close friend to my brother, where is that fellow they call Fuzzy Butler?"

Russell stared at him with a peculiar expression, then, with a queer half-grin that made Norman uncomfortable, said—

"You want to know a little somethin'?"

"Yes."

"An' you won't go talkin' to nobody?"

"No."

"Well, Fuzzy Butler he didn't go to Texas."

"Where did he go?"

"T' ——, I reckon;" then hastily: "No—nope. I'm sorry to say I didn't do it. A better man than me got him. But nobody knows it just yet."

"Why not?"

"Well, that's part of what all you'll learn by an' by if you are the sort of feller Slim says you are. An' Slim is some plumb severe on estimatin' of a feller's backbone. I hear Slim tell how Barney, over to Reddin's, put you on to things, an' it give me the idee to sort a-finish where Barney left off. I may get what Barney got, but them's chances a feller has to take. But I'll tell you this much: Fuzzy was hired to get Bob. Not but what he was willin' his own self, but he was bein' paid."

"Go on. Who paid him?"

"Say, I'm gettin' in deeper than what I ca'calated on. But by thunder I will tell you—no maybe I'd better not—not unless you promise not to make no plays to settle with that feller. He's a gunman hisself, though he hires most o' his work done. It's safer."

"Red Allister, you mean?"

"You've shore got your nose on the right trail."

"Did my uncle know it?"

"I don't know what Black Renalds knows. He don't tell folks his business. He had my dad's note three year, an' never said boo. Dad he must a-forgot all about it too, though he did onct or twict speak about owin' Renalds. When he died Renalds he sent Allister over to get our cows."

"Do you know that Allister did put Butler up to it?"

"I shore do. Fuzzy he talked a heap a-fore he had his sick spell, an' he said 'Red Allister.' Fuzzy he was so scared he told all he knowed and stuck to the truth.

"You see it was this away. Me an' this other feller an' a friend o' ourn held a sort o' court, and Fuzzy was invited to tell all he knowed or get shot *pronto*. He was paid to get me, Bob an' old McCullough. Bob was first on the list, then Mac, then me."

"It was McCullough that killed him!"

"No it wasn't. Nope. You'd better quit guessin.' It wasn't Mac. There wouldn't be no secret about it if it had been Mac."

"Oh," Norman exclaimed, a little excited by the thought, but in his voice there was almost admiration: "Then it was the girl—Kate! *She* would do it!"

"You are plumb dead right she would—but she didn't. Say, you got a lot more savvy than I give you credit for. But I'm not goin' to tell you, an' you can't guess, not in a thousand year—not in two thousand. But Fuzzy he weren't shot down like he ought to have been. It was a fair chanct he had.

"I'll tell you jest how it was. Him an' me and this other feller, after our little court scene as you might say, rode out on the prairie, and Fuzzy he was give *two* guns. We was all hossback, an' Fuzzy stood at twenty yards. I kept him covered to see that he didn't start first, an' each of 'em had to put their gun hands on the horn.

"I shot in the air—that was the signal—an' they started reachin.' Fuzzy was a dead man a-fore his gun was out of the holster. Of course he didn't have a chanct—why should he have? But he'd always made his brags that he was a two-gun man, an' there was shore his time to prove it."

"But his body——"

"That'll all come out one o' these days. But don't you keep interruptin.' I chased off up here to tell you somethin' you've got to know if you're goin' to stick up for nesters like Bob done, an' it's jest this: Red Allister'll be havin' somebody gunnin' for you, like he done for Bob an' me an' Mac. Allister he's gettin' quite some cows of his own, mostly vented Star Y they are, too.

"An' if I was you I wouldn't pay none too much attention to that Frazier girl. Buck—he's a good feller, Buck is—but he's powerful sore about your whackin' him with a cane anyway."

"I don't think I need your advice in that respect," said Norman coldly.

"You may not need it a-tall," Russell answered with impudent unconcern. "But I jest thought I'd drop in an' tell you on my own hook—seein' as Renalds ain't around. Bob always had a sneakin' likin' for you. An' I didn't allow there was anybody else handy to warn you about Allister, 'cause nobody else around here knows that he hired Butler to do it; an' he's got plenty more jest as bad as Butler.

"But you jest set tight an' you'll learn a heap o' things, cause this country is shore goin' to bust wide open with a nester war. There's a lot more I could tell you, about the way the Star Y is bein' run, an' rustlers an' such. But this is enough for one time.

"Only when you see Renalds an' Harvey gettin' so excited over rustlers you jest sort a-remember that the 44 Circle an' Allister's Lazy A has stole more Star Y cows the last few years than rustlers ever will. Which is a whole lot more than I ort to say unless you're goin' keep your mouth shut tight. But I allow it's jest about what Bob would want me to say, seein' as how you are full of good iron.

"Well, now I'm gone."

He picked up his hat and gloves and started.

"Just a minute," said Norman, putting out his hand. "I am awfully glad you came. And I *am* miserably ignorant of what is going on, though I have sensed from the time I got to Martinez that something is very wrong. But I am not going to put up with any dirty work from the Star Y. If it has to fight nesters it will have to fight clean-handed."

"Then you shore had better get in a pile o' soap—an' keep your mouth cinched tight. If Allister knows you know what I've told you, he'll have you buried a-fore ever your uncle gets back home."

"And tell me this, Russell. Who burned out Frazier's?"

"I reckon as how there's a lot o' people that would like to know. Harvey he's all het up over that. It looks like somebody had rode in on his range an' done his work. But when there's any dirt done in this country, jest say Red Allister an' let her go at that. You won't be far off.

"I'm gone."

With that he went trampling and jingling across the veranda and to his horse. But when he had mounted and looked around Norman, watching him, felt a sudden fear that gave his body a nervous tingling. Bud Russell was grinning as if he had played a great joke. He did not hide the grin. He waved his hand and rode off.

XVIII

DURING the next few days there was much excitement on the Star Y range. An attempt to enter Turges Cañon, which lay about eight miles back of the ranch house, was beaten back. The cañon was a narrow, boulder-covered, rock-bottomed defile; and two men had horses shot from under them as they tried to push back to see where the cattle had been taken. The attempt to enter the cañon was given up for the time being, but a guard was placed at its mouth to keep rustlers from coming out or more cattle going in.

Harvey, being in charge of the Star Y while Renalds was away, meant to dig them out; but that would have required scrambling up over the mountains and working in back, and he did not like to leave the range for such an expedition just at this time when he was getting ready for the Fall round-up, and when nester trouble was on the increase.

Farther south, down in the Santee country, fresh reports came up of more burnings and killings—Red Allister's work. The nesters over in what was known as Ameco Bend, where McCullough was fenced in, which was Star Y country, were under arms and defiant. Several times they had shot at Star Y men from across fences as the cowboys rode by.

The country tingled with excitement.

On top of this, Harvey had words with Norman, who tried to make the grim quiet foreman understand that he, Norman Standish, was owner of the Star Y.

Harvey, with stern quietness, had replied that he knew nothing about the legal situation which might or might not entitle Norman to claim the Star Y; but that he had been engaged by Renalds, and would continue to carry out his instructions, and that by these instructions he was once again to warn the settlers of Ameco Bend to move, and if they were not on the move by the time of the Fall round-up they were to be driven out.

"Look here, Mr. Standish," said Harvey, pulling slowly at one end of his mustache, and eying Norman, "I don't know anything about you. I was left in charge, an' I am going to remain in charge till Mr. Renalds gets back. Then you an' him can settle it."

"But if the nesters aren't on the move, you don't expect to remain in charge after he does get back, do you?" demanded Norman, staring hard.

Harvey's face changed color, and his short, thick body was rigid. He looked dangerous.

"Young man, at first I took a likin' to you. But I haven't any now."

"I haven't any dislike of you at all, Mr. Harvey. But I am going to have my way in the management of this ranch. Do you still refuse to tell me who burned out Frazier's?"

"I do," said Harvey, his features hard-set, but as if with something more than a determination to keep silent.

"I was over there yesterday, and I gave Frazier an order on the Emporium for lumber and goods. I sent two men from the hay ranch, with a team and wagon, to help Frazier until he gets settled again. And if they are again burned out, Mr. Harvey, I shall hold *you* responsible. And I have reason to believe that you called on some of Red Allister's men to do that job before."

"I never called on Allister to help me with anything!" said Harvey quietly and hotly. "And you, young man, had better be more careful with your words."

"And you, Mr. Harvey, do not need to get angry. *I own this ranch.* And will you tell Buck Blevins to do what I have already said?"

"Yes, I'll do that."

"All right," Norman answered, and walked away.

Harvey, always a man of few words, stared after him, then thoughtfully rubbed his chin, slightly shook his head with grave puzzlement.

Out by the blacksmith shop he found Buck Blevins, and had a little talk with him. Buck's face grew red and dark, then almost white, from time to time; and he stamped about and swore great long oaths from time to time, and otherwise uttered vigorous expressions of protest, swearing as well that he would see himself in —— first. But it was no use. Harvey, not without the thin trace of a smile, insisted.

"Well, Mr. Harvey," Buck at last conceded, "if *you* order it done, I'll shore do it; but I'd rather lay down an' let a hoss roll over me, horn an' all. I'll git even with that pet tenderfoot if I have to bite a leg offen him. He's ridin' me for that little mistake at Davis's, an' I shore wasn't in the wrong 'cause you all took him for a pilgrim. But he wants to let Jess Frazier alone with them city manners o' his'n. If I had the money to pay Renalds, I'd shore tell you all where to git off. It's ——, Mr. Harvey. It shore is!"

Buck in every respect was the Easterner's idea of a typical cowboy, even to his courage and ability to ride. He was tall and good-looking, young, always with a broad silk handkerchief about his neck, a wide hat with a wide, silver-studded band, a blue shirt and deer-skin vest, leather chaps with wide fringe that flapped softly when he walked, very high and very sharp-pointed boots, and large long-shanked spurs with tiny silver bars dangling from little chains that added musically to the jingle when he rode; and he wore a .45 low down on his hip. He was a good man, but even some of his friends thought him a little too full of vanity for his own comfort.

He now went to the barn and to Matheson, the crippled barn boss, expressed himself with agitated fluency; then borrowing the barn boss's horse, and with the avowed intention of finding the oldest, slowest, most decrepit piece of horse meat that could hold a bridle, he rode out into the horse pasture.

The barn boss sent one of the little Mexicans that were playing about the barn door over to the round corral with word that everybody was wanted, quick.

The five or six men who were busy teaching broncos that it was all foolishness, such horse-notions as believing that a man could be shaken out of a saddle, came with a rush —on horseback, of course, though it was not much more than a hundred yards. It was said that a cowboy would walk a mile to ride half-way back.

Matheson, the barn boss, passed the news of Buck's discontent; and the men, eager for a little amusement, squatted about, rolling cigarets and waiting.

Buck returned from the pasture and led through the gate of the barn corral a gentle and lazy horse—there were no decrepit horses on the Star Y. He threw on his saddle and led the horse out where the men were waiting for him.

Buck would never have a gentled horse in his string; he liked the ones that were half-wild.

"Goin' a-teach some gal to ride," said one of the men, eying the horse.

Buck was jammed full of strong feeling, and he began expressing himself. He spoke at length with sizzling words, and concluded:

"That sheep-headed tenderfoot thinks he's goin' to even up on me; but there's other days than this a-comin.' I'll show 'im—the whanged-dinged-blankety-blank!"

"W'y Buck, you shore sound sorta peeved."

"Buck here's an onappreciative cuss. He's gettin' sent to town, an' jest you listen to 'im!"

"Any o' you hombres want to go in my place, you're plumb welcome. That white-faced pet o' Renalds' picked on me—a Mexican ought to do it. I'm some riled. I wish I'd blowed a coupler' toes offen him there in Davis's. Now grin, you hoss-thieves. This ain't no joke. He's tryin' to make one, but you'll see! I'm goin' git the money somehow to pay Renalds an' quit—you all 'll see. You're lettin' him turn you into a pack o' nesters. I'm a cowman, I am. He's makin' me the joke of all the country hereabouts, but by——".

Buck broke off into incoherent expressions.

The men listened with judicial gravity. When he had paused one of them remarked soberly—

"With a little more practise he could express hisself fluent-like."

"But not forceful," another observed critically. "He don't know many good cuss words as yit. But he's young."

"An' eager for to learn."

"Since when have you turned ag'in nesters, Buck? I think you'd like the care what he's takin' o' them there Fraziers?"

"Shut up!" said Buck.

"Here comes your escort, Buck!"

A Mexican driving the buckboard, loaded with loose hay, a keg of water and a sack of grain, came slowly down from the buildings near the ranch house and drew rein.

The Mexican boy looked toward the men and grinned.

"Look the other way, you blasted oiler!" shouted Buck. "An' don't let me see you grin ag'in 'tween here an' town."

"Buck, that there ain't no way for to treat your escort," a voice offered reprovingly.

Then Norman appeared on horseback slowly driving a Jersey cow and calf.

The men were silent and expressionless as he came up.

Norman rode to within a few feet of Buck and said:

"You can tell Mrs. Welch that we are sending in some hay by the next wagon from the hay ranch. She can use this calf for veal. I'm sending one with a calf to save you from having to milk her on the way. This cow isn't to be hurried—it will dry her up. It ought to take you about four nights. Tony has water and feed. You can get water at the hay ranch, and again at Reddin's. Remember now, you are taking a milk cow to babies. You are not chasing a steer out of the brush."

Buck did not answer, and Norman rode off.

Buck glared after him. The men broke into grins and comment.

"Mr. Standish don't want him to git thirsty—Buck here can drink milk for his dinner."

"Did he give you the right to drink milk on the way too, Buck?"

"Maybe Tony's got it in his pocket."

"Tony's goin' along for to show Buck the way. He might git lost out on the lonesome prairie."

"Ought to rub a little milk on that cheek o' yourn, Buck. It's shore good for the complexion."

"Nuss-maid to a milk cow!"

"On a two-hun'red-dollar saddle!"

"That's right," jeered Buck. "Stand up for the tenderfoot!"

" 'Sposin' the calf gits sick, Buck—kin you milk?"

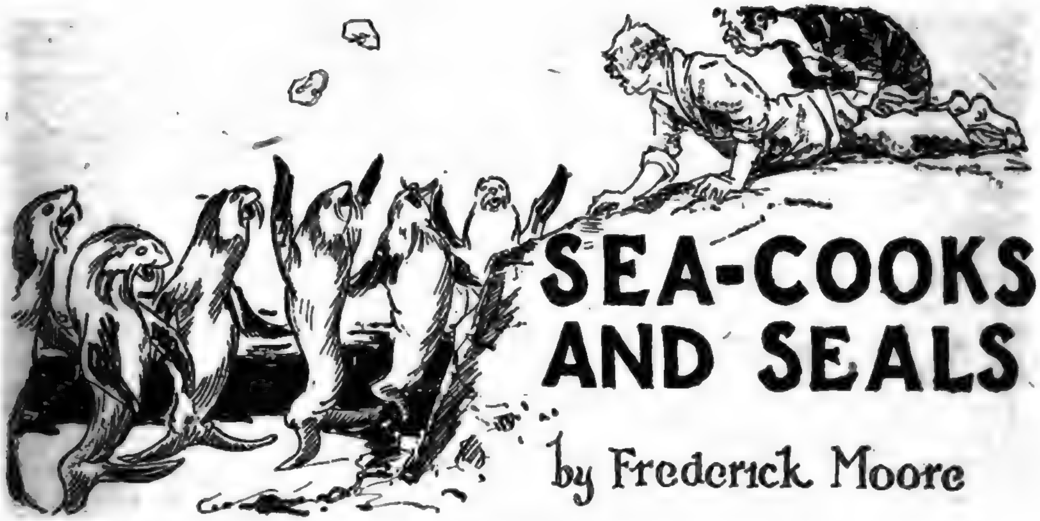
"Jest git down on your hands an' knees, Buck, an' play you air the calf. The cow she won't know no different."

"Oh —— you—all of you!" he cried, and leaped into the saddle. "You'll see how this comes out. You'll see!"

"Remember, Buck," a voice called in a different tone. "That cow is for babies!"

The Jersey followed, munching hay, slowly after the buckboard. Buck rode at something less than a walk, sitting rigidly, burning up with anger.

TO BE CONTINUED



SEA-COOKS AND SEALS

by Frederick Moore

Author of "The Tiger Kid," "Jungle Eyes," etc.

THE schooner *Laughing Jane* was laying at anchor off the coast of Palawan, and I was sitting in the main cabin picking my teeth after supper. Captain Coddles was in his room changing his shirt, so I knew something would go wrong. It always does when the skipper puts on his other shirt.

Pie Gow, our Chink cook, was messing around in the galley. He'd been cook for us quite a while, and outside of the fact that he got stewed to the gills once a week regular on his own home brew, he was pretty sober. He didn't have any vices except that he smoked *chandu* pretty steady, and oftener than that when opium was cheap. He was always gentle as a kitten, except that once he stabbed a Kling bosun in seven places, and when things didn't suit him he tried to kill everybody aboard. Outside of them little flaws in his character, he was a good scout.

But when you've got the best cook you've ever had in a schooner you can overlook a lot. He was one of the old-fashioned Chinks that wears his hair in a rope down his back, when he has a vacation lets his finger-nails grow, and works only to get money to lose gambling. I suppose he learned cooking from his mother—she kept a boarding-house in Swatow for ghosts.

Well, about the time I hears Cap'n Coddles cussing because the buttons was all gone from his shirt Pie Gow comes in from the galley and holds out to me a big, green, square-shouldered bottle that once carried

Dutch trade-gin, but for some time we'd kept filled with brass polish.

"You catchem this, velly good, me throw it you," he says to me, and lifts his lips to show his two front teeth.

That was the way he always showed he was good-natured. If a horse done it you'd say he was going to kick.

I takes the bottle and looks at it. Up to the cork it was full of a pale, golden liquid that made bubbles when it moved like castor oil. I took the cork out and smelled of it and was reminded of Jake Tupper's fish market back in my home town in Maine on the Fourth of July.

"What's the matter with it?" says I.

"You drinkem," says Pie Gow and showed his teeth again.

"I ain't sick," says I.

"No sick stuff," says Pie Gow. "More better you drink, s'posin' you do, you be king."

"Fat chance to be king around this place with Cap'n Coddles," says I. "S'posin' I be king, that make trouble and lose my job as mate. No king business in mine, thanks. Too much competition to sell crowns in hock shops."

"Velly fine," says he. "Me makem."

"What is it?"

"Japy."

Just then Cap'n Coddles came out of his room and looks at me mad with his glass eye, bites down on his false teeth to make sure they'd stay in and pushes his wig of hair a little down on his forehead to make him look important.

"What's the row, Faggin?" says he with a slant at the bottle I'm holding in my paw.

"Japy," says I. "Beyond that deponent sayeth no more, but thinketh a lot."

"Japy!" says he with a start and a queer light coming into his good eye. "Why, that's Chinese wine."

"It's all of that," says I, "and maybe you could go farther. Me, I don't intend to."

Pie Gow giggles and shows his teeth to the skipper.

"Where did it come from?" asks Coddles.

"Pie Gow made it in his hash foundry," I explains.

"Oh, ho!" says Coddles, looking pleased. "That's what he's been experimenting with, is it? That's why he wanted dried peaches and raisins and hair tonic. I don't mind if I taste it," and he takes the bottle away from me, gentle but firm.

"You better smell it first," says I. "Not that I cares what becomes of you now that you don't owe me any money, but I've got a good heart even if I be the mate of this schooner."

"You ain't got no manners," says Coddles. "Why don't you be more careful what you say?"

"In this case," says I, "I'm not worried about my manners but what might happen to me if I was to drink that stuff."

"That's your New England caution," says Coddles and takes out the cork; throws his head back to look up at the sky-light as if he'd noticed something strange up there, clears his throat like he was going to make a speech, and drinks.

It was a long swig he took—sounded like an oil-burning battleship filling her bilges with thick oil through a leaky hose. He keeps his good eye on the skylight and the glass one on me and groans. But keeps looking up after he stops thoughtful-like and not sure he'd done right to stop.

"What do you see?" I asks, and Pie Gow grins.

Coddles busts out crying, and the tears runs down his nose.

"Be you pizened?" I asks.

"What I sees," says Coddles through his sniffling, "is that we've never appreciated as we should have, Pie Gow's abilities. And it makes me sad."

"Oh, cheer up," says I. "He's a good cook—I'll admit that."

"Cook!" says Coddles in a soft, gentle voice that was new to him and to me. "Cook! My stars! Don't insult him by calling him a cook! He's a—a—a—a artist, and——"

But he stops talking, throws his head back again and has another gurgle at the bottle—a longer one this time. Then he groaned louder than ever.

"Hold on," says I. "If it's as pleasant a death as that I might try it myself, seeing my insurance ain't expired."

"You wouldn't appreciate it," says Coddles, holding the bottle away. "You don't understand what these Oriental races can do when they're in the mood."

"I can appreciate anything that puts you in a good humor," says I and reached for the bottle again.

"No you can't," says Coddles. "You smelled it first, and that shows that when it comes to Chinese wine you ain't a conner-swear."

"I'll swear in a minute," says I, "if you don't pass me that bottle."

And I gits a half-Nelson on him, and he sits down limp-like, a dreamy look in his good eye.

"All right," he sighs. "Pie Gow can make more of it," and he lets me take the bottle away just as if he was a baby with a piece of red candy.

"To think," he says, looking over at Pie Gow, "that you've been cook in this schooner for upwards of seven months——"

"Six," says I. "You'll owe him an extra month's wages if you don't be careful."

"I don't want to be careful in any matter of a month's wages with Pie Gow," says Coddles through his tears. "To think," he goes on, "that you can make wine like that, and we regard you as only a cook of victuals! My stars!"

"Shut up!" says I. "First you know you'll give him the schooner. Don't spoil a good thing."

"Wait till you've tasted it," says Coddles to me. "Then you'll likely talk like I do. Man, but that thing is as smooth as donkey-engine oil in the Winter, and has a flare-back to it that's gentle—but would make a cage of panthers sorry for their past. I know! And I won't never say no more brutal words as long as I'm a skipper!"

"Some remedy for man and beast," says I. "I expect that when I've had a drink I'll start for the North Pole in duck pants and expect to pick violets in January."

With that I blows out my breath and inhales a drink. I looked around the cabin for a minute, and I must say things did look pleasanter. Even Cap'n Coddles, the old grampus, looked like he might be human.

"Gosh!" says I. "It certainly does brighten up this packet! Where does the stuff grow that he makes that from? Where, I asks you with tears in my voice, does——"

I blows out my breath again and takes another nip, and by that time Cap'n Coddles was waltzing with Pie Gow up and down the main cabin.

Well, Pie Gow knowed then that he was a success—and so was his wine. After the second drink I can't remember much what happened till next morning. And by that time Pie Gow was making more japy under strict orders from Coddles.

We was waiting for a load of sandalwood to come off, and after breakfast the skipper said he thought he'd go fishing on shore for red snappers. He'd always wanted to fish for 'em, but never had time before. So he decided that as soon as Pie Gow had his new lot of japy made it would be time to start.

So we poled away in the dingey, me doing the rowing, and got up around the bend of the island where the current set just right in among a lot of rocks and begins to fish, leaving the dingey beached on a sandy place.

We sat on a big high rock and catched at least a half a ton of red snappers. Anyway we had two strings of 'em that we could hardly lift, and by that time the green bottle was empty. So along in the afternoon we pulled in our lines and decided to get back into the dingey and pole for the schooner.

Coddles was up first, and while I was rolling in my last line I hears him give a yelp. He was up on the high part of the rock and turns around to look at me.

"What's wrong?" says I.

"Jumping catfish!" he whispers. "There's an aquarium or something broke loose all over the place! Never did see such a sight in my born days—if I *do* see it!"

"If you *do* see it?" I snaps. "What you mean, you old shell-back?"

"You look and see if you can see it," he says. "Suffering sardines! Not since I was with the Prince of Wales when he opened the Suez Canal have I seen such a sight!"

I CLIMBS up on the high part of the rock and looks over toward the dingey. And what I seen made me open my mouth—and I couldn't shut it again.

"Can you see it?" says Coddles with a shiver.

I keeps looking and nods my head.

"What is it?" he asks down behind the rock.

"That Chink wine," says I.

"I thought something slipped," he says. "But if you can see it too, then it's all right."

"Thought what slipped?" I asks.

"Something in my head," says he.

"That wouldn't be strange," says I. "But, come to that, I can see 'em as well as you did. And nothing has slipped in my head."

"Then they're there!" moans Coddles.

"No," says I, taking another look. "They ain't—we only think so. I say it's the japy."

Well, my nerves was strained some, even though I was trying to keep Coddles up in his courage. For what do I see? There on the edge of the sandy shore between us and where the dingey is beached, is six big seals, wet and slick, standing in a row on their tails, and their flappers held up like a parson asking a blessing!

"I say it's sea-lions," said Coddles. "And if you can see 'em they're there and that's all there is to it, by snum!"

"No seals ever acted like that," says I. "And got away with it. Either they're bughouse or we be—and the betting is even odds it's us."

"Go and shoo 'em away," says Coddles. "Remember, I'm the skipper and you're the mate."

"On board the *Laughing Jake*, yes," says I. "But as we'll most likely never git back to her, I resign. I never did hire out to cowboy a lot of wild seals for you."

Coddles cusses under his breath and crawls up on the rock to have another look. There the seals stick with their heads swaying and their whiskers sticking out and their teeth showing, like they meant to use 'em on us.

"I know what it is," says Coddles.

"Something slipped again?" I asks, polite as I could.

"It's the wine all right," says Coddles. "And it's all the work of that slant-eyed son of perdition, Pie Gow. He's charmed us."

I looks at him, cross.

"Good thing you got somebody to blame it on, now that I've resigned," I remarks.

"Just the same, this is Oriental stuff, and I'll never be the same," says Coddles, beginning to cry again. "We're mermerized or something."

"Call it that if you want to," says I, "but the judge would have another name for it—especially if he could see that empty bottle."

"Maybe it'll work off if I take a nap," says Coddles.

"You'll stay awake, you big bonehead, and help drive them seals away so we can git back to the dingey," I tells him.

"I'm your skipper," reminds Coddles.

"Skip all you want to," I shoots back. "Skip right over to them seals and pull their whiskers."

"Don't you talk to me like that," says Coddles.

"I'm a private citizen that's out of a job," says I. "And that gives me rights, one of said rights being the privilege of making insulting remarks."

"Then why don't you insult the seals?" says Coddles.

"I only insult people who might give me a job," says I. "All the others I'm polite to. And just to show how polite I can be I'm going to throw a fish to them seals and make friends with 'em, now that I ain't working for you."

"You go to work fishing for 'em," says Coddles. "I'm out of it—until you want your job back."

"Any way I'll find out if they're real," says I. "If they ain't, they won't want fish. In that case we don't need to pay no attention to 'em."

"No," says Coddles. "I notice you've started paying no attention to 'em—by staying behind the rock."

"If we only think they're seals all we got to do is think 'em away," says I. "It's all your fault anyhow—you thought of 'em first."

And with that I throws a red snapper to the boss seal—the biggest one, that looked like a yearling bull without any legs.

He ketched it in his mouth like a dog!

"Look!" says Coddles, saracastic-like. "The seals I thinks up, thinks you're throwing fish to 'em; and you think I'm to blame for thinking you think that——"

I couldn't hear any more. Low and behold, as the poets say, all the seals begins to bark and prance around on their tails. And then they begins to dance together, two by two, and made the sand fly like a typhoon had struck.

"We're done for," says Coddles after a while. "It's just as I said—Oriental stuff."

"Oriental my mother-in-law's black cat!" says I. "Them are real seals out of the well-known and real China Sea."

"It ain't so much the realness of 'em that bothers me now," says Coddles. "It's the way they act—all that dancing. It's ag'in' nature. No place could they have learned to turkey-trot like that except in Mike Strunsky's Babylonian Gardens in Frisco."

"That's the way all seals do when they're happy," says I. "They appreciate the red snappers."

"There's a whole ocean full of red

snappers," says Coddles. "Why do we have to fish for seals?"

"Because you're loony," says I, not having any particular answer—and that's always good, when you don't know what else to say.

"Yes, just as loony as you," says Coddles, and sits down and starts crying again.

"Now look here!" says I. "There's trouble enough on my hands with that flock of seals out there, without having a kindergarten on my hands, said kindergarten being said skipper of said schooner, and said——"

"Oh, shut up your ding-danged saids," remarks Coddles, real peevish. "You give me the shivers when you begin to talk like a prosecuting attorney or a warrant!"

"You been keeping something back from me," says I.

"What?" he asks, looking as embarrassed as an old walrus like him could look.

"You been in jail," says I. "Nobody could know so much about the law without being in jail—and a six months' course at that. Where did you graduate?"

"I'd rather be in jail than here with them wild seals loose on the beach."

"You ought to know," says I, "seeing as you're familiar with both situations."

"Throw 'em some more fish," says Coddles. "That'll shut you and the seals up."

"Ain't you turned generous!" says I. "I'm beginning to believe like you say—you've been charmed by Pie Gow. And only an Oriental could do that, you old grampus."

"If I had a gun, and if it was loaded, and if you kept talking to me like that, I'd shoot you," says Coddles.

"Too many ifs in that to worry me," says I, and hove six red snappers at the seals, one at a time.

But that only made the seals worse'n ever, and what they done next made me sure somebody was loony, even including myself.

Because why? Well, Coddles wiped his eyes and stood up and looked, his good eye almost popping out of his head and his wig of hair standing up straight all around his hat. And I looked some, not sure I was seeing what I saw.

"I agree," says I in a minute, "that it's the wine. And from now on I'm off his home brew."

Believe it or not, them danged seals forms a circle, five feet between each of 'em, and this is what they done when they'd gobbled my fish: The big boy picks up a piece of bamboo and begins balancing it end up on his nose; the next one stands on his head and claps his flippers; the third juggles a pair of stones with his nose, and the fourth and fifth starts a ball-game with a piece of round red coral.

But the sixth! He begins to blow a little brass flute—and plays a tune that sounds like part of "Marching through Georgia!"

"Great gobs of gumbo goulash!" yelps Coddles, and he flops down on the rock, panting like a porpoise. "If that seal ain't playing 'Marching through Georgia' I'll eat the flute—and the seal!"

"You never told the truth harder than that in your life, so far as the tune goes," says I. "The rest of what you said is just brag."

"I'm done," says Coddles. "You finish it off just as you like. I won't talk no more."

"That's a miracle in itself," says I.

"Hark to him play!" says Coddles.

"It ain't what you'd call special good playing, but the fact that he's playing at all is what gives me the dizzy wiggles."

"What worries me," says Coddles, "is where did he find the flute?"

"Oh, that's an easy one," says I. "As they've most likely just come down from the North Pole for a thaw-out, that flute was give him last Christmas by Santa Claus."

Coddles looks at me as if he was almost ready to believe it.

"As good an answer as any," he admits.

"I told you last night," I reminds him, "before you drinks that Chink wine to smell it."

"Oh, blame it on me," says Coddles. "That's what a skipper—or a boss—is for. But while you're in the reminding business I'll just remind you that I didn't have to hog-tie you to make you drink it."

"My!" says I. "Don't we git on chummy! Beef about it all you want to, but you won't think it's so smart when we git back to the schooner. From what we've seen so far, we ain't seen nothing yet. I expect to find that the *Laughing Jane* will be turned into a street-car with a Coney Island sign on it."

"And," says Coddles, "a green frog will be collecting fares from a lot of little old women passengers in sun-bonnets."

"And," says I, "them women will have noses that run down to meet chins that turn up to meet the noses."

"And," says Coddles, "we'll all be crazy together."

"All," says I, "except Pie Gow."

"Him," says Coddles, "I'll stab to death with a feather out of my cabin pillow."

"And," says I, "you hope I'll git hung for the murder."

"You couldn't be more correct," says Coddles.

"And," says I, "it wouldn't surprize me none if I did git hung for it. But our seals want more fish."

"Feed 'em," says Coddles. "Red snappers don't cost much. Feed 'em all away, and when we're gone the seals'll eat us."

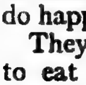
"Ain't you a happy cuss," I comments, optimistic-like.

There wasn't nothing else to do but feed 'em. It was a shame to throw all the red snappers away, but it was gitting late, and I hoped the seals would die of indigestion or something. Anyhow I figured that the effects of Pie Gow's wine couldn't last forever, and in time the seals would fade out of sight just like an oil-well or a gold-mine that's sold on hope in New York but don't exist in pictures on the stocks. Then things do happen, and why not the seals?

They stopped their goings-on long enough to eat a double set of fish. Then they started in again with the ball-game, the flute and so on. Every little while they'd stop, and I'd pass out more fish, throwing 'em overhand.

Well, they et all we had. And as it was along toward dark the six seals lay down side by side and went to sleep, all tired out from catching my red snappers. And we sneaked past 'em, got into the dingey and rowed back to the *Laughing Jane*.

Coddles went to bed. He remarked first that it was just as well we didn't say nothing about what we seen, and I let it go at that. And the next morning we loaded our sandalwood and sailed for Manila.



CODDLES begins to think it over. He felt a lot better on account of Pie Gow having made him a fresh bottle of japy.

"Do you want to see the seals again?" I asks him. "If you do I'll have nothing whatever to do with 'em."

"Seals, Tophet!" says he. "I ain't worried none about them seals."

"So I noticed," says I. "They're gone now—but if they comes again, and right aboard here? What then?"

"Shucks!" says he. "Them seals was the real thing. I can't help your troubles. It just happened that we ran into a flock while they was enjoying theirselfs."

"I hope so," says I. "My arm is stiff from throwing red snappers."

"I've heard of such things before," goes on Coddles. "Anybody that's close to nature can see such things going on among wild animals."

"You're so close to nature that you growl in your sleep," says I.

"What you mean by that?" he asks.

"I'm mate again, and I don't care to say," says I. "But if you'll allow me to put in a word, it works both ways, this close-to-nature stuff."

"How's that?" he asks, not thinking there was any catch in it.

"Close to nature, or close to a bottle of japy," says I.

"You better look out," he remarks with a bad look in his glass eye. "Remember, Mr. Faggin, you resigned your resignation back again, and I'm your skipper."

"And bug-house as ever," I remarks, pleasant-like, and went up through the companion just before he throwed the vinegar cruet.

We didn't talk about it again on the way up. And we'd been in Manila two days, tied up in the Pasig River, when I picks up the Manila *Times* and reads all about it—just as Cap'n Coddles told it to a slick reporter feller that got gabbing the skipper in Tony Timke's café up the Binondo Canal while Coddles felt like having a brag about the seals we'd seen.

"Captain Coddles of the schooner *Laughing Jane* wins the belt as champion three-ring liar of the China Coast," says the headline, and then the whole story is printed of how we seen the seals, what they done and how we escaped from 'em by feeding 'em red snappers.

"Not since the bosun of the bark *Landsman's Home* reported the discovery of a white tribe of natives on the island of Mindoro last lying season," the article goes on to say, "has there been any free-handed lying to compare with this yarn by the well-known and popular skipper of the

Laughing Jane. Over several glasses of mineral water in Timke's Place this morning Captain Coddles lied openly and with a gravity becoming a politician to the *Times* reporter, and such wealth of invention was displayed by the skipper that without doubt he has out-lied anybody ever known in these waters."

"Look what you've gone and done," I calls to Cap'n Coddles, who was pounding his ear in his bunk.

"What's that?" he asks, and comes out lacking his wig of hair.

I reads the paper to him, and when I finishes he takes out his false teeth and puts 'em in his vest pocket, which he always does when he's excited up.

"So," says I, "the paper calls you a liar right out in print—and big print, too."

"And that ding-danged reporter feller was as nice as plum pie to me," says Coddles, looking hurt and rubbing his bald head.

"What you going to do about it?" says I.

"I'm going to lick him."

"You ain't got good sense," I tells him, knowing that would make him madder.

"I goes and tells him that to put in the paper, and he goes and makes me out a liar," goes on Coddles, and spits on his hands.

"Serves you right."

"Don't never tell nothing to no reporters, no time, nohow," says Coddles.

"And don't never try to lick 'em," says I, "or they'll write that up for the paper too."

He puts on his wig of hair and his squeaky shoes and starts ashore.

"Come along," says he. "You got to back me up in this thing."

"You mean I got to do the fighting, that's what you mean," says I.

"No," says Coddles. "This is an affair of honor, and I'll bash his head myself."

"All right," says I. "I'll go along. It'll be worth the time and trouble to see you throwed out of the newspaper office into the Escolta on your neck."

"'Tain't your neck," says Coddles. "And I can't be advertised all over the China Coast as a liar when I seen them seals, and so did you, and I tells about it in the interest of science and so forth—I regarded it as history or something."

"The best way to git called a liar," says I, "is to help out history."

"I'll history that reporter feller," says Coddles, and takes out his glass eye so it wouldn't git lost like it done the time he winked it at a dancing-girl in Burma.

But we didn't have to go far to find the reporter. As we squeaked along past the Harbor Police Station up the Mole, there he was sitting in a chair out under the awning, his feet cocked up on a box and a cigar in his face and his hair slicked down on his head. A couple of police sits near by, and a couple of the quarantine doctors.

We walks along abeam of the lot, and Coddles and me comes up into the wind. Then the skipper walks straight up to the young reporter feller and shakes a stub finger right under his nose—or almost.

"What for did you write me up in the paper as a liar?" yelps Coddles.

The slick-haired *Times* chap squints up at Coddles and grins. Then he turns to a quarantine doctor and says:

"See that? Cap'n Coddles believes it himself."

"Of course I believes it," says Coddles with a snort. "I seen it with my own eyes——"

"Only one," breaks in the reporter.

"Don't git smart," says Coddles, "or I'll bash you one. I can see enough to do that."

"Why," says the reporter feller, "I thought it was all a joke—and that you prided yourself in being able to make up such a good story. Matter of fact, everybody down here on the waterfront is jealous of you."

"Well, it ain't no joke," says Coddles, and squares off. "You step out in the clear and I'll show you just how small a joke it is!"

And he waves his arms around just exactly like a boxer—almost.

"You better come over to Timke's and have a glass of bitters," says the reporter. "Why, you old walrus, you can't hurt anybody. Look out or you'll sprain that arm. Besides the weather is too warm to fight."

Coddles spits on his hands.

"You come to me, or I'll go to you," says Coddles. "I seen them seals with my own eyes—eye—and Mr. Faggin here, my mate, done the same. And I'm here to lick anybody——"

"Just keep calm," says one of the doctors. "Tell us about it again, short and quick. I ain't heard it except what I read in the paper, and if it's true it looks to me like a case of libel. In fact, if you convince me I'll lick the reporter myself."

And Coddles tells it all over again, the big fish. And when he's done he looks at me to back him up.

"That's the straight goods," says I, not realizing there was any harm in backing up my skipper in a thing like that.

The first doctor whispers to the other, and they exchange queer looks.

"Sure," says the other doctor. "Clear case of delusions, and of the contagious type, as you can see, as the mate is also plainly infected with the delusional qualities of it."

"And they'll be violent at any time," says the first doctor. "In fact, the skipper is violent now and wants to commit assault and battery, one of the symptoms of the malady."

The doctors gives some kind of signal to the police and they grabs us, and first thing we knows we're slammed in behind the bars.

"What be we arrested for?" yelps Coddles when he gits his breath.

"For examination in lunacy," says the police.

And that's all there was to it—we was nipped.

"Our fate is sealed," says I.

"Shut up about seals!" yells Coddles to me.

"Look what you done again!" says I. "You've got us jugged, and we'll be in the booby-hatch for keeps—most likely in a strait-jacket."

"They put Columbus in jail when he told 'em the world was round," says Coddles.

"After he'd proved it, not before," says I. "And come to that, there's some difference between you and Columbus—he had a whole ocean full of land to show he was right. But us! Them seals have went."

"Nothing," says Coddles, "seems to be real any more."

"Nothing," says I, "except the size of these bars in front of us."

"It ain't the size of 'em that worries me," says the skipper, "but they are so close together."

"The holes look awful small from this side, I'll admit," says I. "But put in your teeth and you'll feel better. And maybe you'll git a chance to bite somebody."

He cusses a little, but when he gits his teeth in he does feel better, only he has an awful grouch on newspapers.

IN ABOUT an hour an excited man with red whiskers and a helmet shows up and comes to the bars to speak to us.

"My name," says he, "is Blitherington, and I'm interested in all manifestations of wild animals that act civilized. I've studied 'em in all the jungles of the world and in the private preserves of the richest rajahs of India."

"What do you want from us?" I asks.

"I want to hear about the seals, and hearing Captain Coddles was in this——"

"Don't say a word," I warns Coddles. "No matter how you answers, it's a ketch."

"Please don't be so rude," says Blitherington, taking off his helmet and wiping his head with his pocket handkerchief.

"Seems to me," says I, "you're awful stirred up about a couple of shell-backs you never seen before."

"I'm only interested," says he, "in hearing about the seals."

"Take off them whiskers," says I. "We know you—you're Old Sleuth, the detective."

"Why, what can you mean?" says he with an English accent.

"You're the bird who's come to talk with us and prove we're crazy."

"Absurd!" says he. "I wants to hear about the seals."

"We don't," says Coddles. "I'm off seals."

"All," says I, "that we're interested in at the present time is the size of the holes in this cage. If you could loosen 'em up, say——"

"I'll fix that if you'll tell about the seals," says Blitherington, eager-like.

"It's all a joke," says I. "There ain't no seals. It was told the newspapers to make a little fun—but them doctors and the police took it serious—and we got brigged."

"Now I know better than that," insists Blitherington. "From what I read in the paper the account, even though you say it was told as a joke, has all the ear-marks of fact. As a scientific investigator I know Captain Coddles told the truth."

"You bet I did!" yelps Coddles.

"Your hash is settled," says I to him. "But nobody can git me to admit anything."

"I see," said Blitherington, "that your mate has a bad effect on you. Captain, I'll see what can be done."

And he goes off to one side with the policeman who carried the keys and says—

"I can't get any information while they're inside."

"You said something then that wasn't wasted breath," I calls out to him. "We're both deef and dumb from now on, and if that'll do you any good, you can have it free gratis and no strings tied to it."

Blitherington went away with the policeman, and we heard 'em outside the station talking low to the doctors.

In a while Red Whiskers comes back alone.

"Tell me, my good men," says he, "where the seals were, and I'll have you freed."

I waggled my ears at him, and he went away again.

Next comes the policeman with the keys.

"It's all a joke," says he with a grin. "You two can go now—but don't ever again threaten to lick anybody in a police station, and especially not reporters."

So we was let out, and tracks back for the *Laughing Jane*. And no sooner than we was in the main cabin than Blitherington walks in.

"You're harder to get rid of than the seals was," says I, cross to him.

"I want to ask—" he begins.

"You git out!" says Coddles. "I don't want to talk or hear any more about seals."

"Just a minute," says Blitherington, holding up a hand. "I'm a scientific investigator, and I'll give you a hundred dollars to show me the place you saw the seals."

"Serious about that?" asks Coddles.

Blitherington slaps the money on the cabin table.

"Five hundred," says I.

Blitherington bites his lip, but the price didn't stun him, and Coddles sees we have him.

"A thousand!" says Coddles. "I got to take a cargo——"

"Done!" says Blitherington. "But not another cent. I'm not interested more than a thousand dollars, and that includes passage both ways for me—and the seals."

"And the seals," says Coddles. "You mean you want to ketch 'em?"

"Only in case they're willing to come," says Red Whiskers.

"Then if they're willing," says Coddles with a wink at me, "I'll make the job a thousand. Only—we don't hold ourselfs responsible for gitting 'em aboard."

"That's all right," says Blitherington. "Give me a receipt for the money and write out what's to be done. Then we can start."

Coddles looks at me, and I looks at him. We goes in his room and Coddles writes the agreement.

"He's crazy, but the money looks real," says Coddles. "I hope there's no ketch in *this*."

We go out again, and Blitherington's still there. We hands him the receipt.

"Bear in mind," says Coddles, "we don't agree that you'll find the seals. You take all risks."

"Oh, that suits me," says Blitherington.

"Would you mind," says I, "telling a poor ivory-topped sailorman what you intend to do with these seals, in case you catches 'em?"

"Not at all," says he. "I'm from Australia—just brought a circus to Manila—but my trained seals jumped overboard on the way up. I knew in a minute when I read that article in the paper that you'd seen 'em—especially the part about feeding 'em fish. They always perform when we feed 'em fish. And I presume they're lonesome for me. Oh, there'll be no trouble at all in bringing 'em back. They're most likely waiting until I come and find 'em. They're worth all of ten thousand dollars."

"You big bone-head!" says I to Coddles. "You could have had ten thousand dollars."

But Coddles never batted an eye.

"Just to think," says he, "it wasn't the japy after all. It's worth something to know that. And maybe you think now I wasn't such a fool to talk to the reporter feller. Faggin, I've got more sense than you give me credit for. Ain't newspapers just wonderful?"

"Yes," says I. "If you advertise. I'm suited—and all's well that ends swell."

THIS BANDIT BUSINESS IS THE BUNK

A Complete Novelette

by Frank Robertson

Author of "The Mad Commanders," "Silver Zone," etc.

THE range was execptionally good this year; warm Summer rains, alternating with mild sunny days, had kept the grass fresh, green and growing. Now, in mid-July, it was as bright and luxuriant as it usually was in May. It was one of those few years, in fact, in which stockmen's hair grew gray no faster than Nature intended.

Job Hailey, top-hand of the Bar S cow-outfit and close personal friend of old Henry Patterson, its owner, loped lazily across a triangular-shaped meadow and brooded upon the future. He sat loosely in the saddle, his elbows not flopping, but undulating gently to the motion of his horse. He was the personification of grace and he knew it. He was inordinately proud of his horsemanship as well as various other things. For one thing he prided himself on his unfailing courtesy, but he held an exceedingly good opinion of old man Hailey's son Job.

Near the center of the meadow the outfit's band of saddlehorses were bunched tightly together for mutual protection from the hordes of green-heads and deer-flies that seemed to swarm everywhere. Those on the outside were constantly milling around the compact huddle, their noses close to the ground as they struck at their muzzles with their forefeet in a frantic endeavor to dislodge the malignant, humming tormentors while they vainly sought an opening in the tightly packed bunch in which they might wedge themselves.

At Job's approach the horses broke their formation, tried to bunch up again, and, as the rider still came toward them, the bell-mare, from force of habit, trotted away toward the cow-camp at the extreme north-east point of the meadow. Her colt was immediately behind her, with the rest of the bunch stringing along single file, each horse striving to get his head between the hind legs of the horse in front for protection from the irritating insects. The string, Job thought, resembled a gigantic centipede.

The rider followed at a walk. Straight ahead, nestling in a strip of willows that fringed that part of the meadow, was the camp. The horses were within a few rods of the camp when they suddenly stopped, threw up their heads and galloped away across the meadow.

"Must be somebody at camp," Job thought aloud as he touched his horse with the spurs and veered off to the right to turn the fleeing cavy.

He had scarcely started when a horseman dashed out of the willows and sped after the horses at a speed that made Job gasp in astonishment.

"Gosh; that guy's a-hossback," Job murmured admiringly. "Lookit him go by them speed demons o' mine like they was standin' still."

The strange rider on the fast sorrel slipped even with the leaders of Job's cavy and attempted to turn them. The cavy turned accordingly to schedule, evidently thinking it was not worthwhile trying to get away; but the sorrel horse went rearing and careening madly for another fifty yards before his rider could stop him and turn back. By that time Job was close enough to recognize his brother Pete.

"That's a rollickin' bunch o' saddle-horses you got," Pete remarked as the brothers shook hands.

"An' that's some speedy sorrel you're ridin'," Job commented.

"Yeah," Pete acquiesced with a grin. "The cuss has got speed to burn, but you couldn't head a cow on him in a month, an' if you make an awkward move in the saddle he just naturally swallers his head an' tries to buck you off."

"Don't git ridin' enough," Job pointed out. "Same trouble with my bunch ever since the old man took the other two boys to the ranch to ride mowin'-machines. I don't git aroun' to 'em once a month."

To these boys "horse" was the most absorbing topic in the world. In their youth they had built up reputations of which they were inordinately proud. But now both were on the wrong side of thirty, and the cow-land that they loved was passing rapidly. Sheep and dry farmers were conquering the range. Job, in fact, was the only bona fide cow-puncher on the entire range—the only one left who did nothing else. And there were times when his brow wrinkled anxiously as he thought of the time when old man Patterson must sell out.

"Ol' Spider," said Pete, "is the only genuine cow-horse I've got left, an' him I can't keep. Every time the ole cuss gits outa the pasture he beats it back up here to the lava flats, an' he runs with the wildest —— bunch on the range. It takes four men an' a boy to corral 'em."

"After him today?" Job queried.

"Yeah. I give 'em a run this mornin', but this jar-headed sorrel wouldn't do a thing but run past 'em. Bein' nearer to your camp than home, I come on up here. Thought if you wasn't too busy you might help me git 'em in the mornin'."

"Shore, shore," Job agreed readily. "I'd like a little excitement. Cows ain't movin' this Summer, an' I ain't turned a critter fer a week. I'm bored to death."

* * *

THE brothers corraled the cavy and went to camp, and there they found Henry Patterson, Job's iron-bearded employer. Patterson had two bits of news, seemingly completely disassociated, yet destined to play an important rôle in the life of Job Hailey.

"Just got word over the phone that the bank at Riverton had been robbed by a lone bandit," Patterson gossiped. "Feller just walked into the bank, stuck up the cashier, made him open the vault, took what money there was, locked the cashier in the vault an' beat it. They don't know who he was or where he went."

"They'll probably git him at that," Pete remarked. "Seems like every hold-up you hear of these days always leaves somethin' undone that gives em' clean away, or they make some fool break afterwards."

"The trouble is," said Job judicially, "that the fellers who try the hold-up game ain't got brains enough to plan anything right, an' them that has brains know enough not to try it."

"Meanin' that if you was to hitch the powerful engine of yer mind onto a problem o' that kind it'd be plumb simple an' easy to carry out," Henry Patterson jibed.

Job nodded seriously.

"Now if a couple of brainy guys like me an' Pete here was to tackle a bank-robbin' stunt in one o' these little one-hoss towns we'd give it a lot of attention, an' go about it plumb systematic. We could make our gitaway without the least danger."

"Well," Henry Patterson grinned, "mebbe you'll have to turn bank-robber purty soon, fer—" here he imparted his other piece of big news—"I'm afraid yer cow-punchin' days are about over. I've got a chance to sell out to a stranger what wants to raise blooded stock. It'll be many a year before the grass gits so good again, or the cattle looks as well. I'm tired o' fightin' sheep an' dry-land savages, so I reckon the Bar S will sell out."

Somewhere within Job Hailey something seemed to snap with pain as acute as the rasping of a raw nerve. For years he had been dreading this very thing—had known that it was inevitable—but it hurt.

Both of the other men were sympathetic. Pete had gone through that very thing himself. Henry Patterson's business at the camp that day was to break the news. He had tact enough to know that the best way to do it was with a jest. Now he spoke again, carelessly—

"There'll be plenty o' ridin' to do till Fall—an' the deal may fall through."

Job busied himself getting dinner and

the conversation was upon routine range affairs. After dinner Henry Patterson departed and the brothers loafed around camp and talked.

Pete Hailey, ex-cowboy extraordinary, had been more than ordinarily wild among companions where wildness was the rule rather than the exception. Possessed of a reckless disregard of consequences and a stubborn, unyielding pride that would not permit him to accept nor acknowledge defeat, he had, on more than one occasion skidded, as Job put it, on the ragged edge of disaster.

But his crop of wild oats had been sown. Several years before he had married, and his erstwhile recklessness had been dispelled by the responsibility of caring for a wife and two small sons. He now owned the right to pay off first and second mortgages on a small ranch and a small bunch of cattle. His ability to do so was problematical. His ranch was fifty miles south of Job's camp and ten miles south of the little town of Minton.

Job was a striking contrast to his hot-headed brother. He had never been wild; he was steady, dependable and much given to day-dreaming. And he had always been good-naturedly tolerant of Pete and his slightly lawless companions. His own friends were judiciously picked from among the more sober, sedate members of the community. For the most part they were men older than himself who were steadied by the responsibility of families or property. At heart, as Job very well knew, they were no different from the younger, excitement-loving crowd which flocked around Pete.

"Gosh, wouldn't it be easy to stick up that bank at Minton?" Job suddenly exclaimed, harking back to the subject that had semiconsciously persisted in his mind since he had heard of the Riverton robbery.

"Easy as any," Pete replied with utter lack of interest.

"I don't see why somebody ain't tried it before this," Job persisted. "If there ever was a blood-suckin' ole sinner who needed holdin' up it's ole man Reese. He's too darn stingy to hire a clerk to help him, an' that ought to make it plumb simple."

"Thinkin' seriously about turnin' bank-robber?" Pete laughed.

The idea appealed to his sense of humor. Job was entirely too tame to attempt anything like that.

Job laughed with his brother. He had absolutely no idea of robbing the bank at Minton nor any other bank. A career of outlawry did not appeal to him. But he could not keep his mind off the probabilities.

"I was just thinkin' how easy it would be for us if we wanted to go in for that sort o' thing," he said slowly. "We could mighty easy git a stake laid by fer a rainy day. You could clean up your mortgages, an' I'd have something to fall back on when my job peters out."

"What's the bold, desperate plan?" Pete laughed. "Me, I could sure use a lot o' that plunder mighty handy."

Job gazed at his brother contemplatively. It was a serious fact that Pete needed money badly. His ranch was in immediate danger of foreclosure. Job had a vast tenderness for Pete's wife and kids, and it had long worried him that he was able to give them no substantial assistance.

All the time a scheme for robbing the bank at Minton had been running through Job's mind. He had no intention of ever putting the plan into execution, but, having a vivid imagination and a keen sense of the dramatic, he proceeded to sketch the plan in his mind down to the last detail. He did not know that a man might be carried away by the force of his own brilliant logic.

Pete was gazing star-eyed when Job finished. The sleeping dogs of adventure were beginning to awake.

"Lord, Job!" he ejaculated. "You sure missed your callin'! If I didn't have my family to look after I'd be tempted to try it. With your brain an' my nerve to carry it through we'd shore make a killin'."

The allusion to Job's supposed lack of nerve stung. Pete was inordinately proud of his own daring—so much so that he underestimated that of his brother. Many times Job had demonstrated that he possessed nerve equal to the best, but he had never done it conspicuously, so Pete had failed to notice it. Job did not permit his voice to show that the shot rankled, but that instant he determined to carry the thing through.

"You'd be on the wrong end to furnish the action, so I'll have to do it," Job declared.

Pete was never quite sure just when the plan had slipped from jest to earnest, but before the day had passed he realized with fear and trembling that he was definitely committed to the enterprise.

The next day they corralled the wild bunch and roped Pete's horse, "Spider," but instead of Pete leading the horse home as he had intended Spider went to the cow-camp in custody of Job. It was the first move in the contemplated bank robbery.

II

THREE days later Job rode out on top of a low ridge and gazed searchingly about. Behind him the view was shut off by other, higher hills, but before him stretched miles of lava flats crisscrossed with reefs and ledges of black, forbidding rock, interspersed with strips and spots of gray, scraggly sage and various shades of green grass.

Taking a pair of field-glasses from his pockets, he carefully searched the various trails that led from the south. Presently, on one of them, he caught sight of a lone horsemen jogging along in a thin cloud of dust kicked up by his horse's heels. The rider crossed a grassy spot and disappeared behind an up-flung mass of lava. Job sighed and put the glasses back in the case. The rider was Pete—and Job had half-hoped that Pete would not come.

Job picked up his reins and guided his horse into a trail that led to their prearranged rendezvous—a trail so overgrown with chaparral that it was practically indistinguishable to a man of less range-lore than Job. He was leading the Spider horse —who had been detained solely to provide a sufficient reason for Pete coming back to the lava country.

Half a mile from the rim of the flat he broke through the timber into an open grassy, park-like space some hundred feet in diameter and surrounded by a dense growth of tall, leafy aspens. To one side, almost concealed by the timber, was a small spring from which seeped a small stream of ice-cold water. No one would ever find that place except by accident, and at that time of the year the riders were all busy on the ranches.

Job unsaddled the stalwart black horse he was riding, and staked both animals in grass that was knee-deep. From a bundle on the back of his saddle he produced an assortment of odd-looking articles. There was a tattered, black sateen shirt, and an old, high-crowned, wide-brimmed, black slouch hat with a bullet-hole through the top.

Job had been at some pains to find that hat, but he remembered having seen it at an old sheep bed-ground where some Mexican had probably thrown it away because of the hole in the top. There was also a pair of overalls, nearly new, with a few daubs of sour-dough carefully splotched along the front. Also there was a quantity of cold lunch—enough to last a man two days.

He kicked off his chaps and corduroys and donned the overalls. In place of his soft beaver hat and soft, clean gray shirt he put on the moldy sombrero and the tattered shirt. In place of the old blue silk bandanna which he habitually wore around his neck he placed one of new, lustrous black silk—with a pair of holes cut in it for eyes in case of need. Then he safely cached the things he had taken off and returned to the park to await the arrival of Pete. From a mild, well-dressed American cowboy he was transformed into a typical-looking Mexican sheepherder.

Pete whistled with astonishment as he made his way into the clearing and beheld his strangely metamorphosed brother.

"Hully gee!" he ejaculated. "Hullo, greaser! Git away roun' 'em, shep'."

Job grinned and shook hands.

"Reckon I kin pass muster as a Mexican when I git this black rag over my face an' spit out a little Mexican dialect?"

"You shore kin," Pete replied enthusiastically.

Then his tone changed abruptly.

"Say," he said nervously, "don't you reckon we'd better back out now while the backin' is good?"

Job laughed aloud. He had turned that problem over and over in his mind until every proposed detail was as plain in his mind as if it had actually been rehearsed. His qualms of conscience—and they were many—had been ruthlessly submerged. With much sophistry he had convinced himself that the hold-up was justified. Old man Reese was a boil on the body of the community and needed lancing. Pete, and especially Pete's family, needed the money. He, Job, had never been a law-breaker, and after this was accomplished he would never break the law again.

Goading him on, though he did not actually realize it, was his resentment against conditions which were driving him out of employment in the only business he knew, and the long-suppressed crop of wild oats which he had refrained from sowing simply because he was too original to be an imitation of his brother Pete. He was utterly sold on the hold-up idea—an escapade that would make Pete's most daring feat seem mild in comparison.

"Feet ain't gettin' cold, are they, Peter?" he jibed. "With all your nerve, an' all the cussedness you've been into one time or another, stickin' up one small bank shouldn't make you turn a hair."

"It ain't me I thinkin' of," Pete worried. "This hold-up business is serious. My family— You've always been so —— careful an' cautious, you're the last man I know I'd ever suspect o' robbin' a bank. —— if I know what to make of it."

Job smiled superiorly.

"An' I'm a goin' to be a lot more careful an' cautious on this job than I ever was before. I can't honestly say that I'm stuck on this bold, bad, highwayman business, but —— me if I'm goin' to back out now I've come this far. An', dang it, Pete, it's the best chance we'll ever have to git a little money laid by for a rainy day."

But it was of Pete and Pete's family alone that Job was thinking. As far as any personal benefit was concerned he had not figured on spending a cent of the money.

"All right, Job, if you're determined to go through with it I'll see you through; but just the same I'm plumb scared," declared Pete the daring.

"Git it off your mind—I'm takin' all the risk," Job comforted. Then he went on with business-like brusqueness: "Throw yer saddle on Spider here while I stake this buckskin pungo you rode in. Then we'll go over to the spring an' eat our lunch, an' you can light out fer home."

As they lay on the soft, sweet-smelling grass the brothers again went over every detail of the hold-up. There was not a rough place in the entire plan—provided always that Job did not weaken.

BY THE middle of the afternoon Pete mounted Spider and set out on the thirty-mile journey home. Job continued to lie on his back, gazing up into the leafy foliage above him. He was half-intoxicated by the sheer audacity and excitement of the thing he was going to do. He had shaken off, temporarily, the ruling inhibition of his life, and was glorying in giving full sway to a long-suppressed outlaw complex.

Weird evening shadows were undulating in long, grotesque lines on the broken surface of the lava flats when Job finally arose. He went over to Hawke, his own favorite black horse which he had ridden in and led him to the spring.

"You better drink hearty, Hawke, ole hoss," he advised. "This is the last water you're goin' to git till I git back here to-morrow night."

The horse raised his head and slobbered with much gusto. It seemed to Job that there was a flash of reproach in the horse's eye.

"Tough luck for you to have to be staked here all by yer lonesome fer so long, but you'll have to take it," Job told him.

Again making sure that his saddle and the other belongings he was going to leave were securely hidden, Job coiled up the stake rope on the buckskin pony, made a couple of half-hitches around the pony's nose with it and vaulted lightly to the pony's bare back. He was unaccustomed to riding bareback, and he let the little pony take his time.

It was one o'clock when he came to the outside ranches that bordered the little range town of Minton. The town was circled by ranches on north, east and south to a depth of two to four miles, while on the west there was a continuous string of them until they joined other settlements.

Job rode on carefully until he could see the lights of the little towns. Most of Minton was by this time in darkness, but there were two bright spots of lights which he judged came from the two saloons. Job was as familiar with the town as he was with the meadow by his own camp.

A quarter of a mile from town he dismounted with a grateful sigh and untied the rope from the little buckskin. He slapped the horse across the hips with the coiled up rope and watched him trot out of sight on his way home to Pete's ranch ten miles farther on. Job listened until the last, faint sound of hoof beats told him the buckskin had passed through the town successfully. Then he threw the coiled up rope into an irrigation ditch and watched it float away.

He trudged on in to the town, making his approach through a dark alley until he reached a shack of an ice-house that stood behind one of the saloons. Separated from the saloon by a six-foot alley was the State Bank of Minton.

Job knew that a few of the roof-boards on the rear of the ice-house had been removed during the Winter to give the men storing the ice greater freedom of action in pulling the huge cakes up near the roof. It was an easy task for him to swing himself up to the roof, lay these loose boards aside and let himself through. As he had anticipated, the ice had settled so that in that end he had three feet of space between the sawdust and the roof. Naturally the ice was piled higher near the front, so that he could not be seen if any one came to the front for ice.

He restored the roof-boards the best he could in such cramped quarters and stretched out on the sawdust. He quickly found that the night air combined with the ice below the ten inches of sawdust was capable of making a man mighty uncomfortable. Before he had lain there a half-hour his teeth were chattering. But the die was cast; the Rubicon was crossed; he had entered the hold-up business, and he must accept the rules of the game as he found them. Later, when a hot, mid-day sun was beating down mercilessly on the blistering roof-boards, he was grateful for the coolness of the ice beneath him.

The hours droned slowly away. Daylight came and gave the would-be hold-up a limited view of the town's activities through the cracks in the building. Once he had occasion to hold his breath and half-strangle himself restraining a cough when a flunky from the saloon came after a chunk of ice. But the man went away without suspecting there was any one in the ice-house.

About two o'clock Job saw Pete ride slowly past the end of the alley that gave him his only view of the main street. Just beside the end of the alley was a hitch-rack, and on the very end of that Pete was going to tie the stampeding, bucking sorrel outlaw he had ridden in.

There was another thing which interested Job mightily. At exactly ten o'clock a bartender from the saloon had come out of the back door with a foaming schooner of beer and gone into the back door of the bank. At twelve sharp he came again, and at two. The bank closed promptly at four.

The big question was: Would the bartender come again at that time? Reese was as methodical and mechanical as an alarm clock. It was more than likely, Job reflected, that the bartender would come again at four—precisely the hour when he had planned to surprize old man Reese.

There was one thing in the embryo outlaw's favor, however: The back door of the bank was unlocked, so he would not have to enter from the main street. He would contrive to handle the bartender some way.

The hours between two and four were full of suspense; yet they were hours of elation. Job munched his lunch without tasting it. His nerves were too tense to permit of hunger, but he knew he would need all his strength. At five minutes to four he glued his eye to a knot-hole and watched for the final appearance of the bartender. The minutes dragged by. A minute to four; four; and a minute past four! Had old Reese locked up the bank and gone home?

"I gotta take a chance on that barkeep comin' in on me," Job thought as he rolled over and reached for the loose roof-boards.

Then he heard the slamming of a door and, gazing through his knot-hole, he saw the bartender hurrying into the bank with his tray and schooner of beer.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Job waited for the bartender to come out. When the man did come out Reese came to the door with him.

"I'll be working till nearly dark, Jim, so bring me another beer at six—and be sure it's right off the ice," Reese told the departing bartender.

"Aw right," promised the barkeep, and the two back doors slammed shut simultaneously.

III

IN AN instant Job had slipped through the roof and dropped to the ground. Not a soul was in sight. Another instant and he turned the door-knob and stepped softly inside. The first glance told him the front door was locked and the blinds pulled down. He could see the heavy automatic pistol which Reese kept by his right hand lying just inside the cashier's window. Reese was just entering the vault in the rear of the room to put away the fruit of the day's business.

With a tentative feel of the black silk mask on his face Job crossed the room with half a dozen cat-like steps. His pistol was jammed into Reese's ribs before the banker realized that he was not alone.

"Steeck 'em up," Job hissed.

With a squawk of terror Reese whirled about and cowered in the corner between the wall and the vault. His clawlike hands went above his head, and Job wanted to laugh as he saw the cold sweat break out on the man's shining bald poll.

"One min-ute an' I have you feex all nize an' sof'," Job murmured affably, and, suiting the action to the word, he trussed up the little man as helplessly as a calf beneath the branding-iron—with the addition of a gag.

To rifle the box-like vault of its contents of currency, gold and bills was but the work of a moment. Stuffing everything into a canvas bag he had brought along for the purpose, he turned and inspected the prostrate banker.

"For w'y you wriggle?" he demanded. "Eet is not w'at you call ze 'comfort' eh? But eet not hurt too mooch. In two hours ze barkeep she coom an' tie you loose, is eet not so?"

He stood and smiled at the little man's convulsive efforts to utter sounds that he knew would be a bitter malediction upon all greasers. Thoroughly convinced that there would be no alarm raised for nearly two hours, Job swung the bag under his arm and walked slowly out.

He was not in the least excited, though he was tremendously thrilled. The deed was accomplished. In the eyes of the law he was a criminal, and he recognized the fact that the hand of every man would be against him. But the sense of fighting a battle against long odds buoyed him up. It was going to be a glorious sensation making his getaway. He knew that he had attended to all the details on his end of the line, and the white sack that had been tied on Pete's saddle with apparent carelessness was the signal that Pete had made everything ready on his end.

He opened the back door cautiously and glanced out. Not a person was in sight. All the town's lazy afternoon activity was indoors or on the main street. He walked slowly down the alley, and at the end of it he again stopped and reconnoitered the cross street. A block away a few children played on a lawn, but there was no one else in sight. Less than fifty feet away was Pete Hailey's sorrel, outlaw speed-demon, tied carefully on the end of the hitch-rack next to Job with a scrupulous bow knot that could be jerked loose with one pull. Two or three other ponies dozed and stamped at the same rack. The owners were doubtless playing poker in one of the saloons.

Job walked rapidly toward Pete's horse, which it had been arranged he was to steal. At sight of him the sorrel snorted and surged back upon the rope. For a moment Job had a moment of panic. If the sorrel should break loose and get away his whole scheme would be disorganized. But the sorrel was not a rope-breaker. At the first hard pull he reared as high as the rope would permit and came forward, striking viciously with both feet.

Job was too good a horseman to be bluffed by anything like that. With a single pull he jerked the knot loose, and as the horse rushed violently backward Job was decidedly with him. He managed to catch the cheek-piece of the hackamore and start the broncho to circling. With one hand on the hackamore and the other on the horn he succeeded in getting his toe into the dangling stirrup, and the very momentum of the plunging horse threw him into the saddle.

He recalled Pete's warning—

"The only way to keep him from pitchin' is to give him his head an' let him run."

Job let him run. As he dashed out of the cross street into the lower end of the main street he caught a glimpse of several men loitering in the shade of the town's only hotel. Then he shot up over a high bridge that crossed a levied canal and was out of sight of the town. There was a chance that he had been seen, and that somebody might suspect something was wrong; but there was a bigger chance the other way, and it made no difference anyway. He knew there was not a horse in the county that could stay in the dust of the sorrel.

"All he needs is a slack rope an' a straightaway course, an' there ain't a thing can keep in his dust," had been Pete's boast, and the sorrel was justifying his owner's confidence.

Job whipped the mask from his face and pulled the black sombrero low over his eyes. He made no effort to check the sorrel's speed, nor to guide his course. The outlaw thought he was running away, and he was running home. Job knew the animal's wind was good for the ten miles that lay between Minton and Pete's ranch. He knew he was attracting a lot of attention from the people at the various ranches he passed, but it was what he wanted to do.

Women came to the doors, shaded their hands and gazed after him disapprovingly. Men in the fields stopped to stare, and he could imagine their muttered imprecations upon "crazy Mexican sheepherders who didn't have no sense no way."

Once a man and a boy in a wagon coming from one of the ranches turned into the lane directly ahead of him. He pulled the big, black hat farther down and made a pretense of trying to stop the sorrel. As he dashed by them he heard the boy exclaim—

"Gosh, dad, that's Pete Hailey's sorrel runnin' away with some sheepherder!"

Job chuckled triumphantly.

"Let 'em find ole Reese now as quick as they wanta," he thought. "Let 'em rave when Pete complains his horse has been stole. There'll be plenty o' witnesses to swear the hold-up went this way, an' by the time they git their posse organized to comb Sheep Mountain I'll be streakin' it back through the lavas on the other side o' Minton."

FIVE miles out of Minton Job passed the last of the ranches, and struck off across a range of low, rolling hills. Straight ahead, seven or eight miles distant, loomed Sheep Mountain, timber-grown and gashed with deep, rugged cañons—an ideal place for a man to hide. Once safely secreted there, a man might remain for weeks without the slightest danger. There were plenty of sheep-camps on the mountains from which he could steal all the food he needed. It was the logical place for a hold-up to hide, and the first place that would be searched. Therefore Job had no intention of going there.

To his left was a long, high, narrow mountain, running parallel with the way he was riding, that was known as "Eight Mile Butte." On the side nearest him the butte was rocky and barren. The other side was clothed with many kinds of brush and timber. At the very point of the butte, on the opposite side, was Pete Hailey's ranch, watered by a large spring that gurgled forth from the end of the butte.

Seeing no signs of pursuit from the top of the highest ridge, Job slowed the sorrel down to a long, racking trot till almost even with the end of Eight Mile Butte. As he rode his eyes searched the immediate vicinity for a certain landmark—a big, white rock. Finding it, he searched the grass for a fake trail that Pete was supposed to have made that morning. It was there.

"Come on you sorrel outlaw—do yer stuff," he murmured.

At the same time he raised both feet and jabbed the spurs cruelly into the sorrel's neck, and raked back. Startled by such unexpected treatment the sorrel lunged ahead, and finding a free rein tucked his head between his fore-legs and went into a spasm of bucking that made it difficult for Job, star-rider that he was, to keep his seat. The spasm was as short-lived as it was violent. The last pitch was but a mere sheep-jump, yet Job went off. He landed lightly on his feet, but contrived to fall down and roll in the grass like a man who had been thrown from a horse.

The sorrel whistled shrilly at this unexpected victory and, swinging his head wildly, from side to side dashed away for home.

Job got carefully to his feet and inspected the tracks. The ground was soft and where the sorrel had bucked his feet had plowed deep into the soil. Any man who had ever seen a horse could read those signs correctly. Only a few feet away were the clearly distinguishable imprints of a pair of high-heeled boots making a bee line for Sheep Mountain.

The inference would be plain—the robber had been bucked off there and had gone on afoot toward the mountain. Farther along that trail would be other developments if Pete had strictly conformed to the plan.

Job removed his boots and swung the sack of money over his shoulder; then struck out in a northeasterly direction toward Pete's spring. It was hard going hampered by the gold in the sack and the necessity of leaving no visible tracks.

"Ugh," he grunted, "if I had to carry this swag for four or five miles like our imaginary hold-up is supposed to do I'd throw the —— stuff away."

The spring was a scant half-mile away, and Job reached it in safety. Down below he could see the buildings belonging to his brother. He felt something of a qualm at not being able to go down there. If the kids knew that Uncle Job was that close to hand and did not come to see them they would be mildly broken-hearted. But, after all, Job reflected, it was for them, principally, that he had committed himself to the banditry business. He had no time now, however, for idle reflections. The main thing was to get away from there at once.

In the dense brush surrounding the spring he found the bay Spider horse closely picketed. Job was thirsty, but he did not take the time to drink. It took but a moment to fashion from the stake rope what is known in range parlance as a "horse-thief hack" on the horse's head. Pulling on his boots and flinging the bag across the horse's withers, Job leaped on and started the horse along a dim cow-trail that led on around the snub nose of Eight Mile Butte. Once around it and outside of Pete's fence he turned due north through the timber that lined that side of the butte and gave the bay horse his head. Spider ran willingly; he was headed toward his own favorite range among the lavas, and the absence of a saddle convinced him that he would soon be turned loose.

Half-way between Pete's ranch and Minton Job left the timber and struck off across the open, sage-covered country to make a detour to the east of the town. Thus he figured to be well north of Minton before the pursuit started toward the south; and even if Reese's predicament had been discovered prematurely Eight Mile Butte would be between the pursuers and the pursued—and there was not the least doubt in his mind that the posse would go on toward Sheep Mountain in search of the supposed Mexican.

Pete, enraged at the theft of his horse, was sure to be along and would see to it that the false trail would be discovered if no one else noticed it. Yes; everything was clear sailing.

Very soon he was out on the lava flat. Owing to the long distance between water-holes this range was used only by horses. There was small likelihood that there would be any riders thereabouts at that time of day. Nevertheless Job kept a sharp lookout and was ready to disappear at the least alarming sign or sound.

The sun was just going down when he reached the little park where he had left Hawke picketed twenty-four hours before. The old black greeted him with a welcoming whinny. Stiff and sore, Job slid to the ground and limped to the spring, where he threw himself flat on his face and drank greedily, unmindful of the fact that Spider had waded into the spring and was drinking just above him.

Getting to his feet, he turned the jaded bay horse loose and watched him trot off across the flat in search of his wild band. The horse's steaming sides and gaunt flanks were mute evidence of the long, hard run he had made; but his weariness did not compare with Job's. Besides the long, nerve-straining wait before the robbery, he had ridden forty-five miles between four o'clock and sun-down, thirty-five of them bareback.

He found everything exactly as he had left it. It was with a sense of tremendous relief that he changed from the sheepherder outfit into his own clothes. It made him feel like a new man. He wrapped the tattered garments into a compact bundle tied tightly by the legs of the overalls and stuck them on the end of a long pole; then he waded to the edge of a mire-hole below the spring and soused the bundle into it four feet deep. The end of the pole came up without the bundle. There was no danger of the disguise ever being found.

He threw his saddle on to Hawke and tied the bag of money on behind the saddle. Then, with a sigh of relief, he settled into the saddle and rode away toward the west. After five miles he reached the stage road between Minton and Riverton. He followed it for a few miles until it forked where a dim road led off in the direction of his own camp. He turned off here and rode another mile; then he turned sharply to the right and climbed to the top of a low, rocky hill. On the top of the hill was a pyramid of lava rocks which some sheepherder had at some previous time erected as a monument to his having passed. Such monuments were known as "sheepherder's gods" and were not uncommon.

Job dismounted and threw off the top of the monument. Finally removing a large rock from the center he replaced it with the bag of currency and carefully replaced the rocks.

IV

IT WAS past midnight when he reached his own camp. The cavy was on the meadow, and he corraled them and caught a night horse, allowing old Hawke his freedom. He then made a minute inspection of the camp and satisfied himself that he had had no callers while he was gone. Everything had worked out perfectly lovely.

He was too tired to cook so he proceeded to make his supper of stale bread and a can of cold tomatoes. And then the reaction came. Completely gone was that feeling of joyful exuberance he had experienced when carrying the plan out, and when he had realized that his getaway was complete. In its place was a feeling of morbid depression.

He felt suddenly old and very lonely. A door seemed to be shut upon everything that had ever interested him. He wondered, vaguely, if anything could ever interest him again; or whether he would be a prey to that spirit of depression for the remainder of his life. He rolled into bed. Perhaps in the morning he would feel more like himself.

From sheer weariness he fell asleep, but only to dream about robbing banks and being swooped down upon by armed posses while his brother Pete calmly sat his horse and shot them down like blades of grass before the sickle. But he, Job, was weighted down by a sack of gold. Strive as he would, he could not quite get his toe in the stirrup to mount his horse.

Suddenly he awoke with a start, the cold sweat breaking through every pore. A horrible, half-human sound seemed echoing back from every hill. It was five minutes before Job could recover his composure.

"Gosh," he laughed shakily, "I must have yelled so loud I woke myself up!"

He threw back the tent-flap and looked out. The sun was just rising, bathing the range in its warm, slanting glare. It was a dazzling day—one in which it was good to be alive and at liberty! Hundreds of blackbirds in the willows surrounding camp were twittering merrily. All nature in rapturous harmony, but that very harmony seemed to strike a discordant note in Job Hailey's soul. He shivered and crawled back into the tent.

After dressing he set about preparing breakfast. It seemed dismal inside the tent, and he wished the stove were out in the sunlight. Always an excellent camp-cook, he fairly outdid himself this morning.

"If I ever did need a good meal it's now," he reflected aloud; but when he sat down to the little camp-table he found his culinary efforts had been in vain.

He could not force down a mouthful of food. He drank three cups of strong coffee and gave it up in disgust.

His habitual neatness caused him to clean up the camp till not a speck of dirt could be found around it. Then he mounted the night horse and wrangled the cavy. The sight of the band of fat horses circling the inside of the corral, playfully nipping one another, snorting and whistling in mock terror, had always brought a thrill to Job and an answering feeling of good-fellowship such as only a real horse-lover can ever know. But today he felt strangely indifferent.

Since he had been alone at camp he had been in the habit of riding only the younger, more rebellious horses, keeping them gentle and hardened for the coming round-up. The most snaky one of the lot was a big roan by the name of Pedro who never, to Job's great joy, failed to put up a fight. Job roped him and led him out of the corral, but after two futile, half-hearted attempts to make the saddle stay on long enough to be cinched he gave it up.

"Ain't in no humor to fool with you, Pedro," he told the horse as he turned him loose and roped an old, gentle stand-by.

He found the cattle contented and grazing peacefully. There was nothing to do—nothing to do. He thought of going to the Bar S ranch, but gave it up because he felt in no mood to answer Henry Patterson's questions. Finally he rode back into the hills a few miles to an isolated ranch where he was always sure of a welcome.

"Hello, Job," the rancher greeted cheerfully, "you're just in time for dinner. An' after that I've got another one o' them thanky jobs for yuh."

"I'm always at your service—an' generally hungry," Job replied good-naturedly.

And he wondered what his friend would think about him if he knew he was a bank-robber.

After dinner he helped the rancher brand a few calves which he wished to turn on the range. He delayed the work as much as possible but the time came when he had no excuse to stay longer. He hated to be alone —for the first time. He picked up a bunch of Bar S cattle that did not need picking up and shoved them on to the heart of the range. The sun was down when he left them and he returned to camp.

NEXT morning his curiosity could be denied no longer. He decided to ride to the home ranch and find out what was known of the Minton bank robbery. Mrs. Patterson met him at the ranch-house door.

"Have you heard the news, Job?" she asked.

"No," he said calmly.

"The bank at Minton was robbed of over twenty thousand dollars," she said breathlessly.

It occurred to Job that that was the first he had known of how much money he had raked into his bag.

"When'd all that happen?" he asked with well-simulated nonchalance.

"Day before yesterday. A man came in through the back door just after Reese had closed up, and when they found him he was bound and gagged."

"The robber was bound an' gagged? Bully fer Reese," Job commented dryly.

"No, you big silly, you know what I mean," Mrs. Patterson snapped. Then, becoming aware of her excitement she laughed: "I'd like to see you excited once, Job Hailey. If you should find out that it was your precious brother Pete who robbed that bank you wouldn't stand there an' grin so darn provokin'."

Gone was Job's smile. He felt himself turn suddenly cold. The ground seemed to have mysteriously dropped away, leaving him suspended in midair. Mrs. Patterson's voice sounded far away.

"Why, Job, what's the matter?" she asked solicitously.

"You don't mean that—that—Pete——"

"Of course not. After what he used to do before he was married I wouldn't be surprized to hear of him doin' such a thing; but he's clear this time 'cause he was playin' poker with the sheriff while it was happenin'."

Mrs. Patterson was a blunt woman and sharp of speech. She liked Job like a son, but her admiration did not extend to Pete.

For the first time in his life Job spoke crossly to her.

"I'm gittin' —— tired of hearin' you always slanderin' Pete," he said gruffly. Then he got a better grip on himself. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Patterson—I didn't mean that at all."

Mrs. Patterson was equally apologetic. "Of course Pete wouldn't rob a bank or anything like that, but Lord knows he was wild enough—'specially when stacked up against a steady boy like you."

Job blushed furiously.

"Here comes Henry now," said Mrs. Patterson. "He'll have all the news."

"Well, Job, has the ol' lady been tellin' you all about the bank robbery?" Patterson yelled.

"Well, not all about it," Job said hesitantly. "Nobody seems to know all about it."

"On the contrary they know all about it," Patterson said. "Remember what you said the other say about the fellers who tried the hold-up game not havin' sense enough to plan anythin' right, an' them that had brains enough to plan it bein' too smart to go into it? Well, this feller proved that theory plumb ample."

"Give us the details," Job demanded.

"Well, it was a Mexican sheepherder. The poor galoot didn't own no horse, but he was wearin' high-heeled boots. Wouldn't that jar you in the first place? After he stuck up the bank he figgered on stealin' a hoss to git away on, an' the one he picked was that runnin', buckin' sorrel o' Pete's. In one way he showed good judgment, an' in another it was —— poor. The sorrel got him away all right, though he attracted the attention of everybody south o' Minton. Then, when he got to the turnin' off place toward home an' the greaser wanted him to go to Sheep Mountain the sorrel just swallered his head an' unloaded Mr. Greaser."

"Well, well!" injerjected Mrs. Patterson, to which Job breathed a fervent amen.

"Tracks told everything," Patterson went on. "It was plumb easy to track them high-heeled boots for a couple o' miles. The trail led straight toward Sheep Mountain. Then it seemed to peter out, but after the boys searched around a bit they found a pair o' new boots stuffed into a badger hole. It was Pete who found 'em. Either they was hurtin' his feet too bad, or he thought they was leavin' too plain a trail. Anyway it got dark on 'em an' they never did pick up the trail again."

Job heaved a sigh of relief, but Patterson was talking on:

"Well, nex' mornin' a sheep man blew into Minton an' he identified the boots as a pair he had bought for a Mexican sheepherder of his'n a month ago. Reese said the hold-up talked like a greaser, and the people who seen him ridin' Pete's sorrel swore that he was dressed like one, so naturally the sheriff went out an' picked him up."

Job experienced a sinking feeling in the pit of his tomach. Had Pete, then, blundered after all? He had enjoined Pete to be careful in selecting those boots, but he knew that it was one of Pete's typical tricks to steal them from a sheep camp. Later Pete would contrive to pay the victim for them. But Job knew well enough that one small detail overlooked might lead to endless complications. Of course he could not see where there was any possible chance of the truth coming out now, but——

"The greaser denied knowin' anything about it, but he was so nervous that he practically give himself away, an' there was one piece of evidence that plumb cinched the case against him," Patterson was saying.

"Eh?" Job started out of his reverie.

"Besides the boots I mean," Patterson said. "The greaser admitted right away that the boots was his, an' claimed they was swiped from his camp a few days before the robbery. That made it clear enough, but he had his overalls cut off just below the knee, an' they was darn near new. He said they had frazzled out on the brush an' he had cut 'em off to git the tatters out o' the way, but it was a cinch he had cut 'em off to wrap his feet in when he decided to abandon his boots. It's a plain case an' there'll be at least one less Mexican sheepherder hoggin' the range."

Job's thoughts were strangely mixed. His getaway seemed to be absolutely complete. The more than twenty thousand dollars was safely hidden where he could get his hands upon it when he wanted it, but for all that he was troubled. While planning a way to divert every suspicion from himself and Pete it had never entered his mind that they might be framing up an entirely innocent party.

He hated sheep and sheep-owners as bitterly as any cowboy. In fact he carried on a feud with them that was as unique as it was futile—he would never shoot a coyote no matter what the opportunity, nor how tempting the target, and he always protested when other cowboys did.

"Coyotes," he was wont to say, "are the only allies the cattlemen have got in this here range-war. A family o' young coyotes an' their ma can kill more —— sheep in a year than a wagon-load o' saltpeter."

But he never carried the feud nor his prejudice to the herders themselves. They were, he thought, just poor unfortunates trying to make a more or less honest living, and so long as there was sheep some one would have to herd them. Knowing the prevalent prejudice in the country against sheepherders, and especially Mexicans, as he did, he knew that the accused herder would stand a slim chance indeed before a jury composed of ranchers and cattlemen.

V

AS HE rode slowly toward camp that afternoon Job pondered this new phase of the situation. Now that he knew he was absolutely safe the feeling of gloom and impending evil that had bothered him was somewhat dispelled. He felt that he now had greater freedom of action; but how, how could he act? There was the rub!

One thing was certain. He could not let an innocent man go up for his crime regardless of who or what that man might be. But to give himself up and confess his guilt was obviously out of the question. He would not mind it so much himself, but he would have to drag Pete down with him—and Pete's family. That, absolutely, was not to be thought of.

A wild scheme to raid the jail and help the Mexican escape occurred to him, but he quickly realized that his knowledge of such things was entirely too limited and his resources too small.

There seemed to be but one solution of the problem, and he proceeded to put it into execution the momen the arrived at camp. Finding paper and pencil, he proceeded to scrawl, in a carefully disguised hand:

DEAR PROSECUTING ATTORNEY:

I am writing this to let you know you are holding the wrong man for the Minton bank robbery. You will find the money in the middle of a sheepherder's god a mile to the left of the Minton and Riverton stage road. You turn off that road on the dim road that leads to the old Dolberg sheep dip.

After you go a mile you see a rock monument on the top of a hill to your right. In that you'll find the money. Being more than thirty miles north of Minton you can see the Mexican couldn't have left it. I did. Trusting you will give this your attention, believe me,

I. A. M. GOING.

He put the letter in his pocket and cooked supper. As soon as it was dark he rode toward the nearest stage-road. At the end of a lane running to a ranch a mile away was a mail-box. He tied his horse to a sagebush and went forward on foot, leaping across the dusty road to avoid leaving footprints. Fortunately there were several letters in the box and the flag was already up to signal the mail carrier to stop and pick them up on his way to Riverton the next morning. Job shoved his letter among the others and returned to his horse.

The next morning he arose early. He felt more cheerful and carefree than at any time since planning the robbery. It was one glorious day, he reflected. After breakfast he rounded up the cavy and caught Pedro, the big, rebellious roan. With his recent victory fresh in his mind Pedro made a determined effort to avoid being ridden. Job grinned and climbed to the middle of him. Conquering the big roan's resistance gave Job the keenest satisfaction he had experienced for some time—even more so than when he had gotten safely away from Minton with the loot.

He hurriedly made his morning ride on the west side of the range, then turned the roan's head toward Minton. He wanted to see Pete. Among the horses tied in front of a saloon was Pete's sorrel outlaw, so Job dismounted and went into the saloon. Pete was standing with his back to the door watching a card game. Job noticed that there was a slump to his brother's shoulders that had not been there before.

The brothers shook hands in embarrassed silence and walked mechanically toward the bar.

"Whisky for mine," Pete huskily told the barkeeper.

Job glanced covertly at his brother. Of recent years Pete had been going light on the whisky.

"Small beer for mine," he said.

They drifted out into the street and sat upon the hitch-rack by their horses. The hum of their voices could not carry to the sidewalk.

"We've got that greaser into a —— of a pickle," Pete remarked with a forced smile. It was as characteristic of Pete to shoulder his share of the blame as it was of Job to say nothing of Pete's carelessness in stealing the Mexican's boots.

"It was all my fault," Job said. "If I hadn't been so —— anxious to exhibit my nerve an' my alleged brains we wouldn't have got into the cussed mess. But anyway I've fixed it up to clear the greaser."

Briefly he explained about the note to the county attorney at Riverton.

Pete leaned far back across the hitch-rack, slammed his heels together and laughed—with infinite relief.

"So the money goes back to the bank, an' blooey goes our scheme to git rich quick," he chuckled. Then he became serious. "Lord, what I've went through since we started that thing! Nex' time you come down with schemitis I'm goin' to shoot you in the heel."

"Then I reckon I'll walk without a limp fer a long time," Job murmured. "Some one," he went on whimsically, "said 'wealth makes cowards of us all,' an' it sure had that effect on me."

They glanced shyly at each other and in the eyes of each was a suspicion of tears. Both knew that Job's crop of wild oats had been sown and harvested.

"Le's git the mail an' go home," Pete said. "The kids was askin' this mornin' why Uncle Job didn't come to see 'em. They'll be tickled to death to see you."

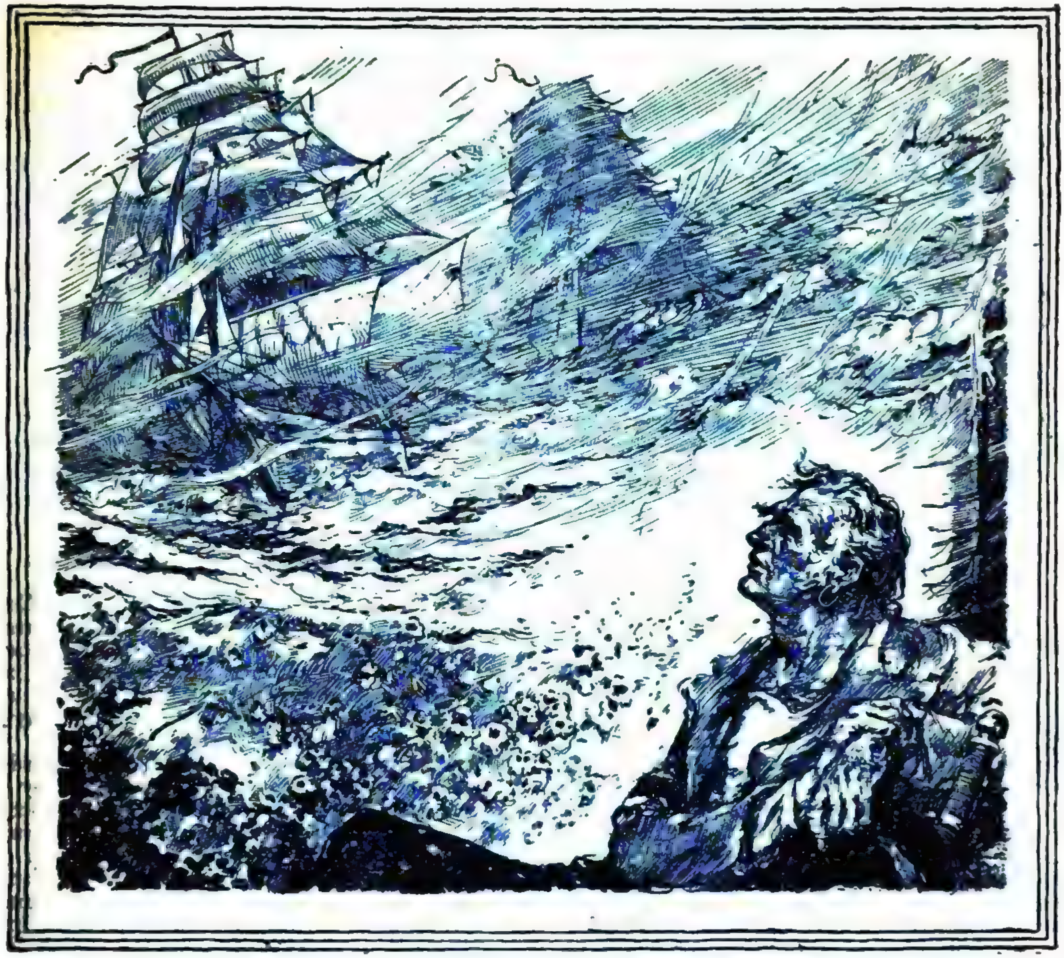
Pete went across the street to get his mail, and Job stopped at the drug store to buy candy for his small nephews. Job returned to the hitch-rack, mounted his own horse and led Pete's across the street to where Pete was standing, reading a newspaper as though dead to all the world.

"That paper petrified in yer hands?" Job asked.

Pete looked up. "They can't git away with it," he remarked, flipping the paper so that Job could read the head-lines.

Mexican Bandit Makes Confession

Suspect held for Minton hold-up denies all knowledge of that affair, but confesses to Riverton bank robbery.



OL' BILL

by Bill Adams

OL' BILL he's having a reg'lar time,
A-living ashore,
A-sitting all day, till it's suppertime,
By the open door.

He says that maybe there'll be some lad
That he used to know
Will be passing by, and that he'll be glad,
For he's longing so

To hear a man tell of a ship at sea,
And a noisy wind
And another ship racing down to lee,
And the gulls behind.

There are flowers that bloom by the open door,
And the grasses grow,
And the song birds sing in the trees ashore,
And the breezes blow.

But ol' Bill, he don't care for none of them,
He just likes to wait
For the steps of wandering sailormen
By the garden gate—

And he says that there's flowers upon the sea
That are blue and white,
And a better than April mystery
In an ocean night.

And he talks of the ships that pitch and dive
With their sails ashine,
As if they were all of them things alive
In the rolling brine.

And the folks that passes, they turn to stare
And to smile at Bill.
"Why, there's that old sailor, I do declare,
A-settin' there still!"

And Bill he's having a reg'lar time
A-living ashore,
A-sitting all day, till it's suppertime,
By the open door.

Ol' Bill," copyright, 1923, by Bill Adams.

THE RETREAT OF THE HUNDRED THOUSAND

An Article-Novelette
by Gerald B Breitigam

Author of "The Legionnaire."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN JUNE, 1920, ten thousand Czecho-Slovaks forming the rear guard of that force of one hundred thousand which, following the collapse of Russia and the Bolshevik alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, had cut their way eastward from the Ukraine to the Pacific, a distance of six thousand five hundred miles, encamped at Valcartier in the Province of Quebec on the last leg of their round-the-world journey to get home. Other of their comrades on leaving the Siberian port of Vladivostok had followed the water route around Asia into the Mediterranean, landing at Trieste. These, however, had crossed the Pacific and Canada, and awaited ships to take them down the St. Lawrence.

America had heard little about the Czecho-Slovaks, and that little only fragmentary. That they were inhabitants of a land subject to Austria-Hungary at the outbreak of the war; that, conscripted and sent to fight their brother Slavs, the Russians, they surrendered voluntarily; that, sent to prison camps at first, they later prevailed on Russia to be released and permitted to form an army taking its place on the front against Germany and Austria; that when the Bolsheviks surrendered at Brest-Litovsk, they refused; that they set out for Vladivostok in order to take ship for France and the Allied western front; that when opposed by Bolsheviks, Germans and Austrians, they successfully resisted; that they had something to do with Kolchak's ill-starred Government—these things were known in vaguely general fashion. But of the intimate details of that modern Anabasis little if anything ever had been published in America. The Czecho-Slovaks had fought their way through the vast mysterious interior of Asia without the aid of newspaper correspondents. They had organized every department except that of publicity.

When, therefore, these ten thousand legendary heroes landed at Vancouver and started eastward over the Canadian Pacific, I set out to meet them at Valcartier in the interests of my papers, the New York *Globe* and the Chicago *Daily News*.

Colonel B. P. Vuchterle, in command, spoke English. So did numbers of others, both officers and privates, who had lived in America or England before the war. Through their aid I was enabled to interview men who were intimately acquainted as participants with some phase or other of the army's exploits. I slept little and listened a lot.

Sometimes I would sit up all night in my room in the Château Frontenac at Quebec surrounded by a dozen men who had been through some one particularly vivid experience or important campaign and slowly, laboriously, turning the interpreter into a dishrag, we would build up from their recollections a complete narrative of the event. Sometimes similar groups of as many as twenty-five or thirty would gather in the Y. M. C. A. canteen at camp, lantern lashed to a pole and casting only feeble light, rain drumming on the taut canvas.

Again I would lie down to sleep in a tent with three officers, and the two who couldn't speak English would keep awake practically all night the one who could, interpreting for me what they had to say. I saw from the beginning that they were men who quite obviously had not been tapped by newspaper reporters before. Speech had fermented in them, and when I touched the cork—*sowie!*

For official data I drew on Colonel Vuchterle. He had set up headquarters in a handsome old French town house in Rue de St. Louis, in order to be near the seat of officialdom in negotiations for departure. Not only did he give me access to all records and maps and interpret them for me, but he spoke much of Gajda and less of Syrovy. Both had held minor commissions in the Austrian Army, but in the Czecho-Slovak Army had risen practically from the ranks to the grade of general.

Colonel Vuchterle had known both at the University of Prague. He was fascinated especially by Gajda, although I gathered from his manner and certain reticences that he did not approve of the latter's resigning from an important command in Kolchak's All-Russian Army at a critical moment.

For Syrovy's withdrawal during the last days of Kolchak's army, rather than attempt to buttress the admiral's waning fortunes, Colonel Vuchterle had approval. To him, and to all the Czecho-Slovaks, Kolchak was too undemocratic to be stomached, his fall was certain, and it would have been a piece of useless folly to allow themselves to become involved in disaster.

One surprize I received. I went expecting to find romanticists, for they are Slavs, and the common conception of the Slav is that he is deeply sentimental. I found hard-headed, shrewd men instead. These Czechs and Slovaks are Yankees in the traditional sense of that word. They had reacted to Bolshevism just as a Down Easter would, for one thing.

For another, despite youth and all they had been through and a picturesque city and picturesque French-Canadian girls they kept their heads. During their stay not a Czecho-Slovak was found drunk in Quebec—and Quebec then had open saloons. Nor was this because strict discipline detained them at Valcartier; no, they were at complete liberty to come and go as they pleased. But instead of spending their money for liquor they bought soap and tobacco, two commodities of which they had heard there was scarcity in Czecho-Slovakia.

One thing more. Play? My ——, how they could play! They could play the heart right out of a man's breast. Several had fiddles which they had made out of packing-cases in Siberia, and sweeter tunes I never heard.

But it was their military band which knocked me farthest north. I heard it one night playing in the bandstand while thousands of Quebec citizens stood or strolled up and down Dufferin Terrace on that high bluff overlooking the St. Lawrence and the Basse Ville or Lower Town, unmindful of the gently falling rain. The band played things from "Hubicka" and "Zampa," now languorous, now dreamy, now full of splendor and fire. And the crowd stayed until the end, despite the rain, firing salvos of enthusiastic French-Canadian *patois* after each piece.

From those associations I obtained a mass of data and impressions. Some—the high spots only—went into a series of newspaper articles published in 1920.

But the vast mass of intimate stuff was unusable in that form. I have been shuffling it since like a man playing solitaire.

When I decided to try to tackle this lengthy yarn the Czecho-Slovakian Consul General Alexis Broz furnished me a lot of official data. In addition I've crammed up on Siberia. This is the result. And I hope I'm the only man who knows how far short it falls of high expectations.

This much can be said for it, however: That to the best of my reporter's ability the facts are on straight as I got them. I permitted myself no fictional license except in the drawing of Alexis Broz, narrator of the yarn. Even he had his counterpart in a six-foot, fair-haired Czech who had been in business in New York and had been caught up in conscription on a visit home in 1914, and who acted as interpreter for me at Valcartier. But of course some of the adventures Alexis of the story experienced fell to various men. Yet all befel somebody. That's the point I want to make.

Czecho-Slovakia is making a name for itself today as the most stable nation in Europe and the one least troubled either by Chauvinism or Bolshevism. When a fellow considers the story of the Czecho-Slovak Army in Siberia he begins to understand why.—Gerald B. Breitigam.

I

AT THIS day when all Europe is an armed camp, when once populous cities like Petrograd and Vienna have sunk into decay and their decimated populations lead a starveling existence, when other great cities of yesterday like Rheims and Lille and Verdun are mere battered shells, and when despite all the ravages of war and attendant pestilence which have swept across the continent these ten years past men think only of flying at each others' throats and there are more under arms and bigger standing armies than in 1914, it is hard to realize the peace and prosperity we Europeans enjoyed in that bygone Spring.

It is hard, too, for those of us who took part in the campaign of the Czecho-Slovaks to extricate ourselves from Russia and Siberia between the Fall of 1917 and the Spring of 1920, to realize that all the hardships we endured and all the heroic deeds we accomplished are not a dream. Yes, it is hard to realize these things despite the fact that our new republic like the rest of Europe is grappling with the terrible aftermath of war while at the same time new wars rage about our borders and the air is continually filled with the rumors of still more wars to come.

In that campaign when we who had first of all been Austrian conscripts, then Russian prisoners of war and still later allies fighting on the Russian side, became definitely alined against the Russians after they made peace with Germany and Austria at Brest-Litovsk and betrayed the Allied cause—in that campaign, I say, we did the impossible. I was through it all, and at every step of the way it seemed to me we were doomed to fail. Not to me alone, moreover, but to most of us.

Yet leaders developed in our ranks—notably Captain Gajda, who rose to be our ranking general—and by their genius they extricated us from the midst of foes who pursued us like ravening wolves and from the handicaps imposed by Nature. We never were more than one hundred thousand in number, and our fighting forces never exceeded three thousand five hundred in any one place; we began our historic retreat practically without arms and were compelled in order to have weapons in our hands to spring upon our enemies with stones and clubs and wrest rifles, cannon, airplanes, trains, from them.

To get to the Pacific and the port of Vladivostok we had to cross eastern Russia, the Urals, that wild level steppe between the Urals and Irkutsk, and the rivers and mountains beyond, a distance of six thousand five hundred miles. Ours was a pigmy band opposed to hosts of the enemy and the gigantic forces of Nature. Truly our tale is epic, for besides the ancient epic qualities of time, space and numbers it includes armored trains, artillery and high explosives. Yet where to begin the telling is something to give a man pause.

Perhaps it is just as well that I identify myself. Not, I realize very well as I sit here in this quiet room of my father's house in Prague, overlooking the trees of the Belvedere where nursemaids are moving up and down the sanded walks with their charges and the cathedral towers loom above the treetops—not, I say, that I am a person of any great consequence in the tale. Nevertheless, people will like to know who it is that is telling them these things, and by what right he speaks.

I was born in this very house; and as my father, Alexis Broz, whose name I bear, is a man of wealth and an importer of consequence, my lot as a boy was in pleasant places. My brother Michael, named for our uncle who carries on the New York end of the family business, used to roam with me in our boyhood into every nook and cranny of Old Prague.

We loved to identify this or that house in the narrow, crooked streets where great men of the past had resided. Here had visited John Huss, there had dwelt some one of the many martyrs in the cause of Bohemian freedom, this was a very ancient street said to have been laid out by King Stephen. We knew all there was to know about this ancient cultural center of Bohemia, this proud old city on its seven hills, belted by the river Ultava with its many bridges, encircled by old city walls from the crumbling summits of which one could stare far over the fertile plains.

And I remember that as mere lads in our early teens we told ourselves and each other that some day we would fight to help shake off the Austrian yoke. For we esteemed it truly a shame that a great people of ten millions, rich in culture and rich in tradition, who centuries before had been the bulwark protecting western Europe from the Tatar and the Hun, should now be compelled to goosestep to the tune of the Austrian drill sergeants.

Yet that seemed to us later, as we entered young manhood, to be mere boyish bravado. Although during our years at the Gymnasium and later at the famous University of Prague, which had been a noted seat of European learning from the time of King Stephen in the fourteenth century, we came under the influence of intellectual leaders like Professor Thomas Masaryk, later to become the beloved first President of our new republic, and imbibed republican doctrines, nevertheless, the idea of taking weapons and fighting the Austrians began to fade away. The Hapsburg rule seemed too strong. Besides, we were drawn into business, and, upon our graduation from the university, we both were sent to New York to learn the conduct of our American trade under Uncle Michael.

It was after several years there that I returned home in June, 1914, on a visit. Then, in the midst of our family jollity and picnics, broke the storm. The echoes of the shot of Sarajevo had not yet died away when Austria ordered mobilization. As I was a sub-lieutenant in the Twenty-eighth Prague, on the reserve lists since my university years, I was called out at once.

With what a heavy heart I walked home from the down-town district where I had been when the order was received! My thoughts were whirling chaotically, and I could make little sense out of them. But through it all persisted and grew a sense of outrage that the German Austrians should dare to order us Czechs or Bohemians to fight in their cause against our brother Slavs, the Serbs and Russians. For we Bohemians are Slavs, and from the cradle I had been taught to regard "Mother Russia" as the protector of all Slavic races and the nation destined some day to help us enslaved Slavs obtain our freedom. Now to have to fight our friends! It was too much.

Over the hours intervening until departure let me draw a curtain. Sufficient to say that we people of Prague had received a stunning blow, that our hearts were filled with gloomy forebodings. Numbers of my boyhood friends were on the lists of the Twenty-eighth Prague, including those closest to me—Sirowy, Kober and Plavu. All were conscripted. Fortunately none yet had married.

Other young fellows of our acquaintance, however, were not so well off. Some had been married, and already were fathers of little babies. They had to go just the same.

In all Prague that night were many sad family dinners.

When at last it came time for me to depart, my little mother clung to me; and as I bent my six-foot form to kiss her my red hair mingled with her white. If our tears mingled, too, who will call me weak? My poor old father stood, dry-eyed but with twitching lips, beside us.

Poor man! He took what money he could get together as soon as I departed, and he fled across the border into Switzerland with my mother. What a wise step this was, later developments were to prove. For the Austrians mercilessly persecuted the relatives of all us Czechs who voluntarily surrendered to the Russians.

Our whole future course could have been read by a prophetic observer, standing on the sidewalk of the Ferdinandstrasse as we conscripts assembled for the march to a barracks five miles beyond the city walls. The crowds were so dense we could move only slowly, and our ranks continually were broken by weeping women. And that in spite of the fact that a regiment of German Austrians, with rifles loaded and bayonets affixed, marched in files ahead and behind us. Not only were the sidewalks crowded, but windows and housetops, too, and as we moved through the streets a volley of shouts that grew in volume until the air was filled was flung at us, such as:

"Don't fight for the Germans."

"Throw down your arms."

"Turn your fire on the Austrians."

The cries were in the Czech tongue, but the German Austrians understood them quite well. Yet it was part of Austria's policy at that moment to ignore, and the old veterans moved ahead with set faces. But we heard, we understood; and our spirits, stunned at the monstrosity, began to revive. We looked at each other; our eyes gleamed, and we saw at that moment into each others' hearts, and knew the same resolution was in all.

II

STUMBLING along in the waning twilight, through the softly falling snow, we moved like white-clad ghosts down a communicating trench and so at last into the main trenches of the front line. It was late afternoon of December 7. After months of marching, counter-marching and labor behind the lines where we were held in reserve, we had been ordered into the front line, and here we were. Our opportunity had come.

We intended to go over to the Russians without firing a shot. Our plans were all made. Every Czech in the regiment was in on the secret. As I stumbled along in the darkness, seeing to a measure of comfort for my men, they would regard me knowingly, although not a word was said. Kober gave me good news.

"Colonel Marten and all the Austrian officers are staying a half-mile in the rear," he said.

I was only a sub-lieutenant and had been too busy with my tasks to hear the news, but Kober was a lieutenant and had received certain orders from his captain. The snow had ceased to fall. Crouched down below the top of the trench—for although it was night the moon shining on the snow made a great brightness—we grinned at each other. If Colonel Marten and all our Austrian officers stayed in the rear, all the better for us. The regiment would be left in charge of us Czech lieutenants and sub-lieutenants. With a quick pressure of the hand we went about our several duties.

Heavy snow had been falling two days. It was hill country, this into which we had been hastily flung, near Limanoff, in the Carpathians. General Brusilov's Russians for weeks had been driving the Austrians back and ever back, until so filled with despair were they that on every side we had heard talk of late from the Austrian officers themselves that we would do well to make a quick peace. Now, however, the Austrians had arrested Brusilov, and we were to hold the line at all costs. Such were our orders.

How we smiled at them! Well we knew the Austrians would not mind if we Czechs were slaughtered to the last man.

Our position was on the center one of three hills. To our right lay the Twenty-seventh Austrian, to our left the Fifty-ninth

Austrian regiment. Across a shallow valley rose another line of forested hills. All were buried deep in snow.

Anxiously we watched for clouds to arise and obscure the moon, which had come up with the dispersal of the snow-laden clouds shortly after our entrance into the trench. It was part of our plan to throw out scouts who would get into touch with the Russians. Presently the clouds again did begin to gather, the moon disappeared, and our scouts crept forward.

Anxiously we sped them, wrapped in white coats for camouflagé, out of the trench into the snow. Their quick disappearance from our view satisfied us they would escape detection from our Austrian neighbors to right and left.

We knew as well as if we had been there what followed when they drew near the Russian lines. They began to sing old Czech songs, and Czechs serving as scouts with the Russians responded in kind. We knew, I say, because while in reserve we had heard now and again by the underground which obtained among us Czechs of others of our brothers in arms who opened communication with the Russians in just such fashion.

The Czechs serving with the Russians were compatriots living in Russia at the outbreak of the war. Russian bureaucrats would not permit them to form large Czech units in the Russian ranks because they feared our democratic doctrines would spread the seeds of revolution among the *muzhiks;* but they did employ the Russian-Czechs as scouts.

As may well be supposed, we spent the rest of the night in feverish anxiety. For my part, I hunted up Kober, and we sat together, unable to sleep, talking in low voices about old days in Prague and speculating upon the morrow.

For a whole regiment to surrender was unprecedented. Already in the opening months of the war numerous Czechs, individually or in small groups, had gone over to the Russians. The Austrians attempted to keep the matter quiet, but as I say, we Czechs had our underground, and we knew.

Nevertheless, an entire regiment was another matter. We speculated, too, upon what would follow once we were in the Russian lines.

"I am going to ask them to let me fight the Austrians," said Kober. "Going into a prison camp, or even working behind the lines, doesn't appeal to me. Here is the chance for which we Czechs have been waiting all these centuries to strike a blow for the freedom of our country with a real chance of success, and I mean to take it."

With this I agreed. Alas, we had yet to learn a lot about "Mother Russia."

With the coming of dawn the Russian attack began. All of us in the Twenty-eighth Prague, a good four thousand men, knew what to do, for all night long the word had traveled back and forth. That our scouts would have been able to communicate with the Russians was assured, although none had returned. Nevertheless we awaited the firing of the first shells with almost unbearable anxiety.

Thank God! None fell in our trenches, while on the contrary the Austrian regiments on the hills to right and left of our position literally were smothered.

Then the Russians charged. Down through the blasted trees of the opposite slope into the little valley, like swarming black ants in the white fields of snow.

"Look, Alexis!" cried Kober, wild with excitement.

He was beside me, pointing to the valley at the foot of our hill.

I did not need to have my attention called to the strange sight, however, for I, too, was watching greedily. The charging Russians had split, as if upon a rock. While one group charged up the slope of the hill on our right, the other charged up that on our left. We alone had no charge to meet.

All the time the big guns continued to fire, only now their barrage was dropping farther back, behind the Austrian positions. Desperately fought the Austrians. We could see them, through the rifts in the smoke, under the newly risen sun dazzling upon the snow, wherever it pierced that man-made fog. But the Russian bayonets were irresistible. Back, back, back, fell the Austrians, until we had to turn around to watch.

Word came up from Colonel Marten, our Austrian Commander, that we should retire. He was a half-mile in the rear. The Russians, sweeping around us, were approaching his position. Doubtless, unable to see what was occurring on our front, knowing only that we had not fallen back although our Austrian neighbors to right and left were in retreat, he believed we were fighting like lions. On the contrary, we had not yet fired a shot.

"Tell Colonel Marten to save himself," cried Kober to the Austrian staff captain who had ridden up with the order to retreat. "We will know how to take care of ourselves."

Grinning men were at Kober's back. The Austrian captain looked, mouth open. Then realization came to him.

"Treachery!" he shrieked, whirling about to ride to the rear.

A soldier was about to fire, but Kober struck up his rifle and laughed.

"Here they come!" rose the cry.

Other voices took it up.

We sprang back to our positions and gazed down into the valley.

The Russians were coming. Not a charge this time. They were walking upward through the snow, gazing curiously toward the summit of the hill upon which we were entrenched. Ahead of them were a number of little figures. They were Czechs—our own men and others who had been in the Russian ranks. They called to us as they came closer, and we answered.

Then a few hardy souls leaped the parapet and ran forward, shouting—

"We are Czechs."

After that, there was no holding us.

Big, strapping boys were the Russians, and they grinned, gripped our hands and clapped us on the back. We dashed on through their lines, yelling like boys, capering, singing. Imagine it, a whole regiment with its colors and even its band! The bandsmen stuck together, each clutching his instrument, and I remember one soldier in his exuberance pushed the drummer so that he fell and with him his drum, both rolling over and over in the snow.

However, we had to hurry; for the Austrians, enraged at the sight, brought to bear what guns were still left to them, and the machine-gun bullets whistled close. By that time, though, we were already amidst the trees of the opposite slope. Soon we were over the crest and in the Russian lines.

Then the bandsmen all got together and struck up an old Czech hymn, and how our voices did roll out in the forbidden strain!

III

FAR different the scene now from that December day when my comrades of the Twenty-eighth Prague swept over the trench at the Battle of Limanoff like water through a gap in a dam, and became engulfed in the Russian ranks. Different, too, the time. For this is March 21 of the year 1917, two and one-half years later. And the scene is a big bedroom on the second floor of a hotel in the city of Rostov. Beyond the city lies the Sea of Azov, and this Russian manufacturing center in the southeast is pretty far removed from the front, lying four hundred miles due east of Odessa and five hundred miles southeast of Kiev.

Much has happened in the mean time. We Czechs and Slovaks in the Austrian ranks have been surrendering to Russia at every opportunity.

But, alas, the bureaucrats have not allowed us to reorganize within the Russian ranks to fight our national oppressor. Poor Kober, how he did lament when we were sent into prison camp at Kurgan, Siberian city northwest of the Sea of Azov and not far east of the Russian border, instead of being permitted to arm and fight.

Here a Russian Pole was in command, a Germanophile who hated everything Russian and gave every latitude to German, Austrian and Magyar prisoners of war while at the same time insulting and oppressing us. Later we were transferred to Ishim, a substantial town of twenty thousand on the Trans-Siberian Railway, three hundred miles east of the Ural Mountains—that low range, like the Dakota hills, separating European Russia from Asiatic Siberia. But conditions were no better, for the colonel in command, while a Russian, was dominated by a German wife. We called her the "Frau Colonel."

Yes, those were sorry times. We soon discovered that the ranks of the Russian army were riddled with Germanophiles and that these men were put in charge of prison camps because they could not be trusted to command troops at the front.

Nevertheless, at Ishim life became easier for us officers of the Twenty-Eighth Prague because our compatriots at the Russian court finally made the authorities see what a shameful thing it was for us to be mistreated by Germanophile prison-camp officials when our sole crime was that we had done a favor to Russia. Accordingly orders paroling us arrived. After that my friends Sirowy and Plavu, as well as others who had a musical education, began moving about among the cultured Russian families of the town, giving music lessons to the young ladies whose sweethearts were all at the front and who were lonesome in consequence.

For my part I bombarded Czech leaders who were working in our cause at Petrograd and Moscow with appeals to be put to work. Eventually my request was granted. I was ordered to move about among the prison camps, organizing the Czechs and Slovaks into societies which maintained constant communication with our national headquarters at Petrograd, and preparing for the day when Russia should give us permission to organize our own fighting corps in the ranks.

It was this work which had brought me to Rostov, this day of March 21, for in the factories of the city were three thousand Czechs and Slovaks who had been released from prison camps to replace Russian mechanics who had gone into the army.

Suddenly my door opens and a man puts in his head.

"The Revolution!" he shrieks. "The Revolution, brother!"

It is the innkeeper, a middle-aged man with a great shock of tawny hair and a withered leg which exempts him from Army service.

"What? What's that?"

I am scarcely able to believe my ears.

It is true. Rapidly he explains. News has just reached the city that there has been a revolution in Petrograd, that the Czar has abdicated and that a republic has been declared. I listen. The bells of Rostov begin to peal.

Over the next three months I shall pass quickly. What went on in Russia during that period is known generally to the world, and it is only of events as they affected us Czechs that I shall speak. Otherwise there would be no end.

General rejoicing in Rostov lasted a week, during which period nobody worked but all made holiday. The Governor of the Province was removed, a Committee of Public Safety was constituted, a new mayor was appointed and a citizen militia was organized to replace the Czarist police, who had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

What occurred in Rostov was the same as was happening elsewhere throughout Russia.

One would imagine that with the conduct of affairs thus rearranged people would go back to work with a will in order to deserve their good fortune in being rid at last of the Romanoffs after centuries of oppression. On the contrary, at the end of that first week it could be seen that the weakening of authority already had progressed far.

Our Czechs resumed work and so, too, did the better element of the Russians. But a noisy minority of malcontents began to make trouble. A committee of workmen was formed which presented demands for shorter hours; more pay and the right to name their own foremen. What demands! Everybody wanted to triple his wages at the very least. Those receiving three rubles a day wanted nine, those getting ten wanted thirty, and those getting only kopecks wanted rubles.

Some concessions were made by the owners, who declared, however, that they would not surrender the right to select their own foremen. Thereupon the malcontents in the biggest factory seized the general director and, wheeling him out in a barrow, dumped him in the street.

Soon the malcontents, gaining the ascendant, began to make trouble for our Czechs. They declared the only way to gain recognition of their demands was to loaf and cut down production and that the industry displayed by the Czechs prejudiced their cause. This created ill-feeling, which grew rapidly and reached its climax when Kerensky, becoming premier, decreed the formation of Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils. At once, with the passing of discipline in the Army, soldiers began deserting and wandering back from the front into the rich cities of the Ukraine and then of the Crimea. When they came to Rostov they would enter the factories and demand that the workmen surrender their jobs.

"You are safe back here," they would say, "while we endanger our lives. You get twenty, thirty rubles a day; we, nothing. Now it is our turn."

The upshot of it was that the workmen forced out our Czechs in order to make room for these "heroes," rather than surrender their jobs themselves. But as neither the discontented workmen nor the returned soldiers displayed any industry, but instead spent their time in political arguments, the result was that very shortly work was at a standstill.

Up to that time several of our Czechs, who in private life had been highly trained technicians, had kept work going, mainly with Czech workmen. Not only had such been the case at Rostov but throughout the Ukraine, the Crimea and all southeastern Russia—which districts together composed the manufacturing heart of the empire.

Similarly in the Ural Mountains, rich in minerals, Czechs formed the majority of workers in the iron and coal mines; while through the dense Siberian *taiga* (forest) along the five-thousand-mile route of the Trans-Siberian Railway, from the Urals to the Pacific, tens of thousands of my countrymen were engaged in cutting wood; for wood and not coal was burned in the locomotives.

Now all this was at an end. In the mean time Bolshevik orators were spreading their doctrines in Rostov as elsewhere throughout the vast empire. Less than two months after the First Revolution they began to appear. They appealed to class prejudice, declaring that all wealth was created by the people and that, therefore, everything belonged to the people—the banks, the rich houses and palaces, the factories, the money. Bolshevism, they said, would restore all these good things of life to the proletariat.

Naturally people listened and applauded. Kerensky and his satellites, beginning to realize that they had started Russia toward the abyss, attempted to stop her descent. Too late.

Menshevik orators appeared to try to undo the damage done by the Bolsheviks. They recalled the origin of the war and pleaded that Russia had a solemn duty to stand firm beside her allies. But since when will ignorant masses heed a moral appeal rather than a material one?

It was plainly apparent to us Czechs, moreover, that Germany was not idle. If Russia retired from the war hundreds of thousands of German, Austrian and Magyar soldiers would be released from prison camps, and they could be shunted across Europe to reenforce the hard-pressed German armies on the western front. Moreover, supplies could be drawn from the Siberian granaries for Germany's starving population.

So Germany haled Lenin out of his obscurity at Zurich and sent him into Russia to speed demoralization. Who can doubt it? The German consul at Zurich saw him off, and he traveled across Germany by special train with restaurant and sleeping-cars for himself and his companions. We read all about it in the Socialist papers.

Now came the real beginning of the end. All this talking was thirsty work. From the beginning of the war the sale of vodka had been forbidden, and the vodka shops had been closed. But in the State distilleries were great supplies of vodka, and the Workmen's Councils everywhere seized these stores. Vodka cellars reopened. Soon nobody worked, and everybody was drunk. Vodka had been poured on the revolutionary fire, and the flames were consuming Russia.

During these hectic months I continued in Rostov, liaison officer between the three thousand Czechs and our national headquarters. Our leaders had formed an organization embracing almost all Czechs and Slovaks in Russia, and maintaining headquarters at Petrograd and Moscow. Our homeland of Bohemia was still under Austrian rule, but the western Allies had promised to help us gain our national freedom, and had recognized our national council sitting at Paris as the *de-facto* Government. With the Paris council our Petrograd council was in constant communication and accord.

From the first, Russia had refused these leaders permission to organize a Czecho-Slovak Corps in the Russian ranks and call for recruits among the Czechs and Slovaks in prison camps. The bureaucrats of Czarist days feared our democratic doctrines would have a bad effect on our Russian comrades. Then came the Revolution. But the revolutionary leaders were too engrossed in keeping their heads above water to heed our pleas.

Now, however, Kerensky in his growing despair of stiffening the Russian armies clutched at us as a drowning man at a straw. He saw us keep our heads in the growing chaos and hoped that we would form so disciplined and resolute an army that the Russian soldiers would be shamed by our example.

When his order came, abolishing prison

camps and permitting Czechs to volunteer for Army service, we in Rostov hastened at once to leave for Borispol, a big military camp not far from Kiev, which had been assigned as our base. I left with the last group of three hundred toward the close of June.

Standing at the side of that third-class train, watching the men file in, their broad, honest faces agleam with determination and lighted in more than one case by superior intelligence—for many ex-officers were volunteering as privates, just as many had been serving in the factories—my heart was filled with foreboding. In this mad land, which was going to pieces about us, what would be our fate? Would we get to the battle-front only to find our Russian allies abandoning us, leaving our little band to face alone the mighty hosts of the Teutonic empires?

And if Russia made peace, what then? We could not surrender to the Germans, for well we knew Austria would treat us as traitors. We could not hope alone to cope with Hapsburg and Hohenzollern.

Truly, it was a gloomy outlook.

IV

IT WAS Winter again, and night. Snow was falling, although not thickly. Bundled up until we were mere shapeless heaps of clothing, in order to withstand the piercing cold, the military chauffeur and I crouched behind the windshield and tore through the darkness across the Volhynian plain. The road we followed was beaten down by the passage of Army transports, but even so the frozen ruts caused us to bounce about fearfully, and the chauffeur had all he could do to keep his car on the road without devoting any conversation to me.

Therefore I gave myself up to reflections. And gloomy enough they were, despite the occasional excitement I experienced when I speculated upon what possibly could be the reason for my summons to Kiev.

"The Delegates want you to perform a delicate and dangerous mission," my commander had informed me at Polonoje. "Your knowledge of Russian has singled you out, but what the mission is I can not say."

If the outlook for us Czechs and Slovaks had been gloomy the previous Summer when I left Rostov for the training-camp at Borispol near Kiev, which had been assigned us, what was it now in February? It is true that in the intervening period, despite disorganization of all Russian railways and the placing of innumerable obstacles in our way, forty-five thousand Czechs and Slovaks had managed to make their way from the Russian and Siberian prison camps to Borispol. Two divisions and the skeleton of a third had been formed.

It was true too, that at Zborov and elsewhere we had met and beaten German and Austro-Hungarian forces, despite the absolute refusal of Russian supporting troops at Zborov to fight. We had also kept the railroads in operation for troop and supply movements in two districts vital to maintenance of a front.

The First Division was in the government of Volhynia, southwest of Kiev, near the Polish border upon which great hosts of Germans and Austrians were massed; the Second was in the Province of Poltava, southeast of Kiev, toward which the Central Empires were thrusting a spearhead from Hungary. But were our efforts worth while?

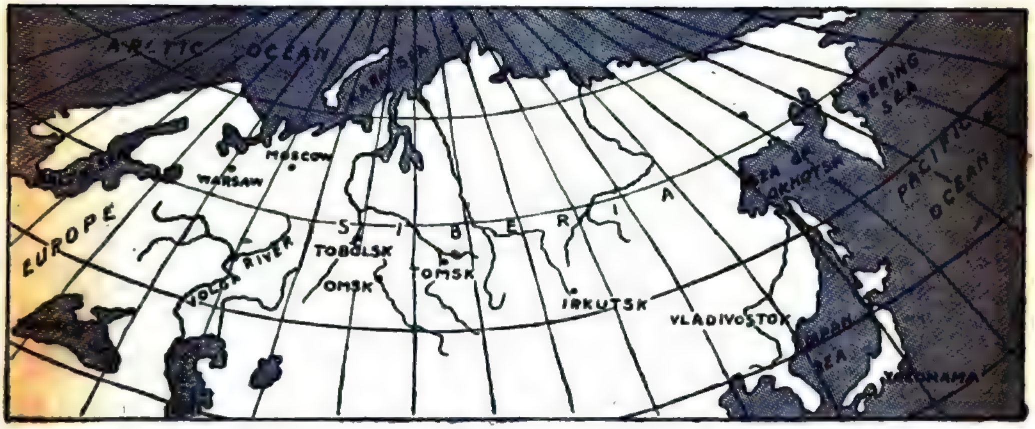
All pretense of maintaining a front had been abandoned by the Bolsheviks, following their seizure of power in October. The moment they came into control they began to preach that the war should be ended by everybody simply throwing down his arms and ceasing to fight.

In fact, numerous Bolshevik orators preaching such doctrines had invaded our camps, but of course they had met with ill success. Even the humblest of us knew quite well that so long as German and Austrian autocracy remained uncrushed there could be no liberty in the world, certainly not for our homeland. Bolshevik practise might succeed in bringing about peace; but what a peace!

Therefore, although the Russian armies continued to crumble away, our divisions remained firm until, at the end of the previous year, ours was the only dependable, disciplined force left on the Russian side. It was then that danger threatened us from a new quarter. The German and Austrian hosts knew quite well our perilous unsupported situation, yet they stayed in their trenches instead of advancing against us, and the reason for this we could not fathom until word came that German influence at Kiev had caused the overthrow of the Bolshevik Government and the seizure of power by a pro-German group. Then it became apparent that unless we moved with the utmost despatch we would be trapped.

Peace negotiations were begun between the Ukrainian Government and the Central Powers. President Masaryk of our *de facto* Government, who had made his way from Paris to Kiev, convened the Delegates whom we soldiers and our compatriots in the old prison camps had elected.

Assembling at Kiev, they notified the Ukrainian Government that we would not join in peace negotiations with Germany and Austria but instead would seek to make our way to France to join the western Allies. Permission was asked of the Ukrainian Government and of the Bolsheviks at Moscow for our troops to make their way eastward across Russia and all Siberia to Vladivostok, where our Japanese allies would have ships waiting to take us to France. It was grudgingly given.



At this time there was no longer a Russian army opposing the Germans, while only here and there in that vast empire stretching clear across Europe and Asia from the shores of the Baltic to the Pacific, more than eight thousand miles, and from far inside the Arctic Circle to the Black Sea, the Caspian and the semi-tropical heart of Asia, were any forces left in organized resistance to the Bolsheviks either. Except for Kolnikoff, with twenty-five hundred officers, on the Don; for Ataman Dutov among the Ural Cossacks and for Ataman Semenov at Chita in distant Siberia, on the edge of the Gobi Desert, the Bolsheviks were everywhere supreme.

Yet the fact that they were in power did not mean a strong centralized Government. On the very contrary, Russia had crumbled into an infinite number of little states, resembling more than anything else the chaotic conditions obtaining in medieval Europe.

It is true, local officials termed themselves Soviets and were organizing units of the Red Guard. Yet in reality they owed no allegiance to Moscow, and wherever a strong rascal seized power he was supreme.

This was the situation when, in the middle of February of 1918, we learned that German and Austrian armies with a strength of fourteen or fifteen divisions had at last started to move forward across the deserted Ukrainian front and were moving up by forced marches to attack us. At once our Delegates ceased negotiating with the Ukrainian Government for railway trains. It was clear the pro-German Ukrainians were merely delaying us in order to ensure our falling into German hands. Our divisions were ordered to break camp and start retreating afoot without delaying any more to wait for the railway equipment which never came.

We were still under Russian commanders who had officered our two-division corps from the time of its formation under the Kerensky Government. Only minor officers, sub-lieutenants, lieutenants and a few captains were Czechs or Slovaks. General Sokorov, corps commander, who was at Kiev; General Kolomensky, commanding the first division, to which I was attached, and which was concentrated in the districts of Zitomir, Berdicev and Kasatin, one hundred and twenty miles southwest of Kiev; General Podhajecky, commander of the second, which was to the southeast of the capital, holding the Poltava railroad up to Kharkov—all were Russians.

These men agreed with our Delegates as to the necessity of speedy retreat. They were Russians of the old Army, and themselves detested the Bolsheviks.

Whether, however, they would accompany us to France was beginning to be doubtful. Already the Bolsheviks of both the Ukrainian and the Moscow brands were beginning to exert influence to detach these men from our side, mainly with promises of preferment in the Red Guard which they were organizing. However, we were assured the Russian officers would stay with us until we should reach Vladivostok.

At the first warnings of secret negotiations under way between the Ukrainians and the Germans our Delegates had gone into consultation with General Sokorov and his staff, and it had been decided to despatch General Dieterichs, Chief of Staff of our corps and former Chief of Staff of the Grand Duke Nicholas, to Vladivostok to prepare for our coming. Accompanied by a number of Delegates, he set out and, after establishing supply stations at all the larger centers on the line of the Trans-Siberian Railway with a guard over each, reached Vladivostok March 12. There he gathered about the Fifth Regiment, accompanying him as nucleus, all the Czechs and Slovaks in eastern Siberia—not many; a total of ten thousand troops.

But to go back. When we found it imperative to start retreating afoot in the middle of February even Nature seemed conspiring against us. It was bitter Winter weather with the temperature at ten to twenty degrees below zero. The Volhynian plain was deep in snow, and icy winds swept across it, cutting to the bone. My comrades of the First Division would face a terrible prospect in their retreat to the banks of the Dnieper, more than one hundred and twenty-five miles away.

AS WE continued roaring along through the frozen stillness of night, bounding this way and that over ruts as stiff as iron, our headlights obscured by falling snow and picking out here a clump of woodland, there a bridge, again a settlement of log houses nestling by the roadside, I had a taste of the hardships ahead of my comrades. Nevertheless, I thought to myself, perhaps this terrible ride was not a true index to what they must undergo, for they would have the companionship of each other on the march, life and movement, while I must sit here, silent, motionless, my companion a voiceless automaton intent only on driving his car.

As to warmth of body, thank Heaven our forces would be well clad. During that chaotic time of the crumbling of Russian arms, vast stores of supplies of every conceivable sort were scattered all over Ukrainia, abandoned. From them we had drawn uniforms, greatcoats and marching-boots for all. In long, gray coats buttoned to the chin, lambskin Cossack caps conical in shape, and thick boots, the troops would be prepared to withstand almost any weather.

I thought of my comrades striking camp, setting trains of ammunition, supplies, artillery in motion. All this would even now be under way, for the troops were to start at dawn of the morrow, I had been told at Polonoje; and, sunk in these reflections, I paid so little attention to our progress that when, at the sound of voices beside us, while at the same time the car came to a sudden halt, I lifted my head from my furs, I was surprized beyond words to find that already we were in a street in the outskirts of Kiev.

The hour was late, but the down-town streets were brilliantly lighted, although the suburbs and the poorer *faubourgs* through which we passed first were shrouded in a gloom that seemed death-like, a gloom which was merely accentuated by the occasional stream of light falling through the door of a vodka-cellar upon the snow. Chilled and stiff, I yet ventured to poke my eyes from their nest of furs as we passed Payar's famous restaurant to catch a momentary glimpse within. The orchestra was playing—perhaps the same airs it had played in other days for the aristocrats. But now, instead of the grand dukes, princes and nobles who formerly made merry there with beautiful women, the tables were occupied by commissars and officers of the Red Guard, men who yesterday had been shoemakers and tailors and clerks.

We drew up before a small hotel on a side street where Professor Maxa, Vice-President of our National Council of Czechs and Slovaks in Russia, maintained headquarters. Sentries at the foot of a dark flight of stairs and again at the top passed me, and the latter opened a door into a brightly lighted room. Through a fog of tobacco-smoke Professor Maxa advanced from a semi-circle to greet me. And then as my eyes became accustomed to the fog and I stood talking to Professor Maxa while removing my numerous wraps, a tall figure in lieutenant's uniform also approached.

Cries of delighted greeting burst from our lips simultaneously. It was Kober, one of my oldest friends, a boyhood playmate in Prague. I had not seen him since the days at Ishim prison camp, where I had left my brother officers of the twenty-eighth Prague to take up organization work among our compatriots.

For a moment or two, while we gripped each other by the hand and talked together at the top of our voices, Professor Maxa stood by, smiling. But then he interrupted good-naturedly, saying our exchanges of confidences must wait until the business in hand was transacted. This recalled to me the fact that as yet I was unaware of the nature of the mission I had been summoned to Kiev to perform.

"We want you and Lieutenant Kober, Alexis, to go to Moscow in disguise and obtain three million rubles from some friends who are keeping it for us," said Professor Maxa. "In our regimental treasuries here at Kiev are only thirty thousand rubles. The money will be indispensable to our troops in their passage across Russia and Siberia. But come, meet some of our Delegates who are here, and all will be explained."

Introductions to a half-dozen Delegates whom Kober already had met followed, and then I found a seat beside my old friend and added the smoke of my pipe to the fog. Professor Maxa explained. One of the difficulties imposed by our hurried retreat was the lack of ready funds for Army use. Without money to purchase supplies we would be compelled to live by forced requisitions and thus would antagonize both townspeople and peasants and add still further to our dangers.

At Moscow, however, we had on deposit in the keeping of a Russian Czech a fund of three million rubles contributed by patriots for use of the National Council. The Bolsheviks did not know about this sum, and they must be kept in ignorance or they would confiscate it. Therefore it had been decided to send a small number of trusted men disguised as Red Guards to obtain the money. They would be unable to travel much of the distance by railway, but would have to make their way on horseback both to Moscow and back afterward to some point where our retreating army could be intercepted.

For this mission Professor Maxa, with whom I had worked as an organizer among our prison camps before the Revolution, was pleased to recommend me. And another Delegate suggested Kober, who had distinguished himself several times in the field with the Second Division and who also spoke Russian well. Our eyes brightened as we looked at each other, and without a moment's hesitation voiced our willingness to volunteer. For such an adventure I could not want a better mate than Kober.

Details were then explained, for already the Delegates had been discussing the matter at length and had worked out a plan of procedure. It was considered that four men would be sufficient to protect each other and that to send any more would be to increase the dangers of detection. Two Russian Czechs who formerly lived in Moscow and had served in the Russian Army as scouts but now had cast in their lot with our corps, were to accompany us.

These men, Dmitri and Boris Smolu, were brought in at the breaking-up of the conference and instructed to submit themselves to us. Both were in their twenties, five feet six or seven, with round heads, fair hair and blue eyes—men to be trusted.

Finally at midnight we were ready to depart. Dressed in Bolshevik uniforms such as the Red Guards had adopted, uniforms which differed little from those of the old Russian Army or of our corps, but which were provided with red arm-bands and with red stars on collars and caps, we received our final instructions.

False passports we had, and money. But we were not given any letters by means of which to identify ourselves to our banker, as such papers would be inconvenient if we fell into Bolshevik hands. At last good-bys were said, and one of the sentries conducted us through a maze of dark streets to the house of a friend in the northern suburbs where four good horses, saddled and ready for travel, awaited.

The mean back streets of old Kiev, narrow, crooked, black as a militarist's heart, seemed like paths through a dead city, so devoid were they of life, light and movement, as we stumbled through them. So at length into the saddle and north under the cold stars. The moon had set, but out in the open the light of the stars on the snow gave sufficient illumination. With the ice-bound Dnieper on one hand and on the other a line of low hills, we struck northeastward for Moscow to penetrate to the heart of Russian deviltry and whisk away from beneath the very noses of the chief devils a sum for possession of which they would murder us without compunction—if they but knew.

V

OF THE twelve days it took us to reach Moscow little need be said. We traveled steadily, yet spared our horses. Twice we exchanged them for fresh mounts at the farms of Russian Czechs to whom we had been directed. All this part of Russia lies in the most populous and settled district; many Czechs had made their homes here, and these patriots were known to our leaders.

Several times, passing through villages or small towns, we were forced to submit to examination; but our passports and our fluent Russian disarmed suspicion, and our story that we were couriers to Lenin from the front won us respect. That we should be traveling by horseback instead of train did not seem suspicious, for in such condition were the railroads that ours seemed the surer way of reaching a destination.

Twilight of the twelfth day found us in a woods six or seven miles from Moscow. Across the treetops we could see in the distance the dome-like towers of the Kremlin and of many churches, Oriental in suggestion, looking like puddings from which thin spikes reached skyward. After giving our horses a ration of oats and tying them securely so that they could not wander in our absence, we ate sparingly of black bread and sausage and, when night had fallen, set out.

A low jumble of houses against the skyline, above them the darker bulks of churches and palaces, over all a thin moon. We talked little as we swung along the road, passing the first of outlying villas. It was unlighted, a dark huddle in the shadows.

Other villas, all closed and tenantless, began to appear. Either their inhabitants had fled from the Red Terror, or cowered in some gloomy recess within, afraid to betray their presence by striking a light. It was nearing midnight, and we seemed four shadows in a world of shadows, for besides ourselves not a soul was abroad.

Only once was the silence broken. Behind us we heard the roar of a powerful motor, and we leaped into a ditch by the roadside, crouching low against the back of a thick, bare hedge whose branches were stiff and brittle with frost. The car approached and passed, bound for Moscow. It was closed, and a dome-light within showed us a military chauffeur at the wheel and a squat, hook-nosed man with short, thick, black beard and black-rimmed glasses over bulging eyes lolling in the rear. Behind came another car, an open one, the rifles of its occupants showing like spears against the skyline. Boris Smolu cursed heartily.

"One of their war-lords," said he after this strange cortège had been swallowed up in the darkness and we were back tramping the road.

Tall Kober's hawk-like face gleamed in the darkness, pale with disappointment.

"What a shot would have done!" he mourned. "Just one shot!"

"Yes," said I, "and then they'd have been on us, and what would have become of our trust?"

"Oh, Alexis!" said Kober. "You're too serious."

Nevertheless I knew the daredevil.

We turned into a winding driveway between two gateposts and made our way a considerable distance between great trees bare against the Winter sky. Presently the dark bulk of a country mansion, low and broad, appeared ahead, beyond a snow-filled oval around which swept the drive. The snow of the drive was unbroken. Not a light was to be seen in the house.

This, said the Smolus, was the home of Tomas Benet, the Russian Czech who had been one of the merchant princes of Moscow before the Terror, and who was custodian of the funds of our National Council.

Not yet were the Reds persecuting our compatriots, especially men of Benet's standing, for the menace of our disciplined troops struck fear into their hearts. So dismal and tomb-like appeared the great house ahead, however, that for a space as we paused beneath the bare trees opposite it seemed to us deserted, and we feared the general chaos had engulfed the inhabitants. We held whispered consultation, and then decided to make our way to the rear.

Striking away to the left from the drive, through the unbeaten snow, we came to the servants' quarters. I think the chink of yellow light through a crack in a shutter dawned at the same time on all.

Kober strode to the door beside it and knocked softly three times, then after a pause twice, then again once, as directed. Silence. We stood anxiously beside him. The light did not go out, and that was a good sign.

In a moment there came from the other side a sound of bolts being withdrawn, of chains let down; then the door swung open a foot, and, framed in the dim candlelight, there appeared the face of a stout, middle-aged woman. Between her and Kober passed a whispered conference; then her not ill-favored features broke into a smile, and she opened the door wide enough for all to slip through.

While she rebolted and rebarred the door, we looked about us. It was a big kitchen and well-appointed, if the gleams from copper and polished cabinet, from glass and china, which shone dully in the shadows where fell the light of the single tall candle burning on a square table in the middle of the room, could be believed. But the shadows were too dense, the room too big, for us to observe much. And besides the woman, a stout, masterful type looking fully capable to cope with any man, had completed her task and stood before us.

Speaking rapidly in the good Czech tongue and smiling broadly at us, as if pleased at our appearance, or amused, she told us to wait. Then she disappeared through a swinging door, which closed behind her; and, opening our coats in response to the genial warmth pervading the kitchen and coming from a great wood range in a corner, we sat down beside the table. In a moment she was back, reproving herself for lack of hospitality and setting out a bottle of wine and some glasses. Then again she was gone.

We drank the wine appreciatively, talking now and then in low voices, until a quick, firm step in the corridor and the opening of the door brought us to our feet. Candle in hand, a white-haired man of commanding appearance, still erect and strong despite advancing years, came into the room. Behind him followed the woman. As Kober and I stepped forward to greet him, he turned to her with a word of dismissal, whereat her face fell; but obediently she withdrew.

"My housekeeper," said he in our mother tongue. "Every night she has kept watch here."

"Then you expected us?" I asked in surprize, for my understanding had been that the Delegates did not dare trust to the wire a message apprising him of our coming.

"No," said he, shaking his head. "And yes. No message has come to me, but I knew the money would be needed and have maintained a lookout."

Having satisfied himself of our identity from the message given the woman for him by Kober, M. Benet now asked us to make ourselves comfortable and himself set out cold meat, bread and cheese and another bottle of wine. While we ate, he questioned us about affairs at the front.

Kober and I explained the situation of our two divisions when we had left. Although twelve days had elapsed, he had little to add except that it had been reported in the Moscow papers that avantguards of the pursuing German and Austrian divisions had caught up several days before with our rear guard at the crossing of the Dnieper and that there had been an engagement lasting a whole day but resulting finally in the complete rout of the Germans.

News is only fragmentary these days," he added. "The Moscow papers are concerned more with spreading Bolshevik propaganda and with preparing the way for the peace about to be made with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk than with chronicling the fate of our troops."

He was silent a long time.

"When you reach our troops again," he said finally, "inform your leaders they must be on guard against the Bolsheviks. I believe that, although consent to our withdrawal through Russia and Siberia has been given, the Reds will yield to German persuasion and attempt to halt our retreat. Yes, they may even seek to disarm and imprison our soldiers. So the troops must be on guard; they must be on guard."

With that he sighed, arose and, asking us to follow, took up a candle and led the way to the cellars. We trooped after, Kober bearing the second candle and plunging the kitchen into gloom behind us. It was a big house, and the stone cellars were large and rambling. The rays of our candles, falling uncertainly here and there, brought out wine casks, piles of cordwood, the dividing walls of vaults. In one of the farthest of these M. Benet instructed us to clear away a great heap of cordwood.

As the last sticks were flung aside an iron ring in the flooring was revealed. To this Kober and I put hand, and up came a square block of stone. Into the yawning aperture, beneath which showed the rungs of a stout ladder, plunged M. Benet. His voice came muffled from below—

"Stow these in your rough bags."

Roll after roll of gold sewed in canvas came up to us, followed by bundles of banknotes similarly protected. We had brought our rough bags with us, and into them we packed all this money, dividing the trust equally so far as packages went. Finally M. Benet again reappeared, climbing out of the vault. Then we dropped the stone back in place and restored the cordwood to its original position.

"Thank God, I am rid of that," said M. Benet, as we stood ready to depart. "In this city of rascals, spies and informers it is not safe to have so much wealth about for long."

VI

THE darkest part of the night found us back again in the deep woods where we had left our horses; and while Boris Smolu stood guard we others, wrapped in great coats, threw ourselves down in the snow, snuggling close for warmth, to snatch a few hours of sleep.

So certain were we that we had gone and come unobserved that we even lighted a fire, although not troubling to build a *naida* in the fashion of the Russian woodsmen, with which the Smolu brothers, who once had spent a year prospecting for gold in the Urals, were familiar. This is done by squaring two fallen trees on one side with an ax and then placing the squared sides face to face separated by wedges. Into this opening hot coals are placed, and the fire travels rapidly along the face of the logs. Then a sloping roof of fir boughs is built with the open end above the *naida*, and the interior of this lean-to soon becomes so hot, even in the coldest weather, that one lying down inside is forced to discard some of his outer clothing.

We were up at dawn and on our way. Traveling whenever possible by lanes and by-roads, avoiding the bigger towns, camping at night in the woods, we pushed forward more than a week without exciting the least suspicion that we were other than we pretended to be, namely Soviet couriers. Kharkov was our objective, a city some four hundred miles due south of Moscow and about three hundred east of Kiev. Toward this point our legions were to make their way and, as they were proceeding afoot, we expected to arrive ahead of them or at least while they were passing through.

The weather had set in mild and clear, and snow was beginning to thaw in the fields, while the roads were becoming mushy from the passage of travelers; for, although none except those upon most urgent business were abroad in this troubled time, yet between towns and villages was a constant coming and going. But late in the afternoon of the eighth day rising wind and scudding clouds indicated another storm was approaching. The air grew rapidly colder, and we knew we would be in for it if we followed our usual policy and made camp in the open. Still, as we rode through lonely deserted country, composed of woodland interspersed with low open marshy tracts, it seemed we were fated to spend another night in the woods, and so we kept looking about for a good place in which to camp.

Suddenly as we emerged from the woods on the brow of a little hill, we saw below us a clearing of considerable extent. Through it ran an ice-locked stream crossed by a wooden bridge, beside which on the farther bank stood what was unmistakably an inn, a two-story structure, rather pretentious, with stables at the rear. The road dropped down, crossed the little bridge, then mounted the opposite slope and disappeared again amongst the trees. Not another house was in sight.

Drawing rein, we sat our horses, gazing down. A man came to the inn door, dimly seen in the twilight, and, shading his eyes with a hand, gazed toward us. Kober gave an exclamation:

"Look! Smoke from the chimney. He expects us. Let us camp here for the night and stable our horses out of the wind."

"And ourselves, lieutenant," grinned Boris Smolu.

"Very well," said I, adding: "If on investigation it looks safe enough. We must not endanger our trust."

"Oh, Alexis, you will get into trouble yet if you don't stop looking for it," laughed Kober. "Come on."

Thereupon we gave our horses their heads and clattered down the slope. The man still stood at the doorway, watching, a big *muzhik*, tall as Kober or I, with broad shoulders and a heavy beard that masked his features.

It seemed to me as if his little eyes displayed disappointment at beholding us, as if he had expected somebody else; but he said nothing as he stepped aside to permit Kober and me to enter while Boris and Dmitri took the horses to the stables in the rear. It was so dark in the common room that we could hardly see each others' features.

"Can we have accommodations here tonight?" asked Kober.

The fellow scratched with stubby fingers in a thick thatch of hair, grumbling unintelligibly. Thinking that perhaps he doubted our willingness to pay and believed we intended to carry off matters with a high hand as many another Red trooper was doing, Kober pulled out a fistful of gold and silver. What folly, I thought. But it was just like the impetuous fellow.

"Come, come, *tovarish*," cried the innkeeper at once in a tone meant to be friendly.

His little eyes glittered.

"That is better," he added. "You know, not all soldiers pay their way these days, and we country people must be careful. Sit down; sit down. Soon there will be something to eat and drink."

He bustled away toward the rear of the house, and we put down our rough bags and rifles against some chairs about a center table. In a moment he was back, bringing a pair of lighted candles, while behind him came a girl who put a bottle of vodka and some glasses on the table.

The Smolus came in, stamping snow from their feet, and loud were their cries of delight as they saw the liquor. It was heart-warming stuff. Besides, the heat of a big stove into which the innkeeper was feeding chunks of wood also began to be felt.

The girl returned, placing food before us without a word. She was not uncomely, but appeared to have been crying; the traces of recent tears were on her cheeks. Steaming soup, big manchets of delicious black bread, a heaping platter of kid stew and plenty of hot tea to wash all down. How we relished this first decent food in many a long day!

So tired were we, having been on the road since dawn, that we were eager to tumble in at once and asked the innkeeper to show us our beds. When we stooped to pick up rough bags and rifles, with a laugh he advised us not to burden ourselves but to leave them in the common room, as they would be all right there.

Kober objected. I thought he said too much, and again I discerned a disquieting glitter in the fellow's eyes.

A corkscrew stairway ascended to the second story, where a little hall split the house, two rooms on a side. In the end wall of this hall, above the stairs, was a window. Kober and I chose one room, the Smolus that adjoining. But after the sound of the innkeeper's boots clumping down the stairs had ceased I called the Smolus into my room and told them to be on their guard as I was suspicious of our host.

Kober was inclined to laugh at my fears, and as I had nothing except instinct to support me I could not reason with him. Nevertheless I insisted we should pull our bed across the door and that the Smolus should do likewise in their room. Then after kicking off my boots I lay down to sleep in all my clothes, for the room was filled with an icy chill, and, being worn from my day in the saddle, fell instantly to sleep. I waked in darkness to find Kober's firm hand over my mouth and his voice whispering in my ear—

"There is some one at the door."

We lay still as death, straining to hear, but the only sound was the frightened thumping of my heart against my ribs. Silence. Then a faint scratching such as I have often heard a rat make in some old corner of our home in Prague at dead of night. Was some one trying to attract our attention? Perhaps the Smolus. Putting my lips close to the keyhole, for I lay on the side toward the door, I breathed rather than whispered:

"Who is it? What's the matter?"

"Open the door," came the reply. "Make no noise on your lives."

"My God, Kober!" I gasped. "It's a woman."

"The cook. It must be the cook. Open the door," said Kober. "Quick. Let us lift the bed."

"But it may be a trap."

"We must chance it."

Moving soundlessly in our stockinged feet, we lifted the bed aside, and I opened the door cautiously while Kober stood with revolver drawn. A feeble light coming through the window at the end of the little hall disclosed a dark figure crouching against the wall. Kober reached out and pulled her in, and as I closed the door her whisper, frighted with terror, pierced the darkness—

"Listen."

We held our breaths. Little whimpering sounds of terror came from the girl. Her hands gripped our arms. A board creaked in the hall. Again, closer, immediately outside our door. Silence. Agony. Then after what seemed an age a board creaked again but farther away. The faint sound was as clearly heard in that stillness as would have been a rifle-shot.

"He's going back," whispered the girl. "He's going down-stairs."

We could hear the creak of the door swinging shut at the foot of the stairs. Silence.

"He's telling them you sleep undisturbed."

Then she began to tremble again.

"You showed him a lot of money," she said.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"They plan to kill and rob you," added the girl. "He suspects you have loot in your bags."

I grew pale as a corpse. In the gloom to which my eyes had become accustomed I could see Kober's face, white as snow. Loot? This innkeeper believed we were thieving Red troopers, murderers, with loot in our bags? Aye, it would be loot for him indeed; that three million rubles for our legions. I gripped the girl by an arm and demanded in a fierce whisper:

"Quick, girl! Explain yourself."

I felt her sway, and she sank to the floor. Kober pushed me aside and, kneeling, placed an arm about her shoulders.

"You know nothing about women, Alexis," he whispered impatiently.

Then he began to pat her on the shoulders and to whisper soothingly as to a child. They knelt in the wan light sifting through our tiny window, and I watched Kober's efforts with beating heart, expecting to see the girl fly into hysterics at any moment and alarm those assassins below. To my vast relief, however, she regained her composure rapidly, and then she and Kober whispered in tones so low that I could not hear what was being said. Presently he helped her to her feet and with an arm about her waist said:

"She couldn't bear to see us killed, Alexis. Her room is opposite, and she came to warn us. She is in fear of the innkeeper with whom she lives. He beat one woman to death and has beaten her often. These fellows below are disbanded soldiers who gather here at night to kill and rob travelers. This is a death-trap."

I groaned.

"We must rouse the Smolus and spring on them. We'll take them by surprize and can shoot our way through."

"Ten to one; big odds," said Kober, surprizing me by his caution.

Usually he was the most reckless member of our party.

"She has placed a ladder against the outside wall at the rear. It reaches to the little window in the hall. The stables are below. We must steal down one by one."

"And the girl?"

"Goes with us," said Kober firmly. "She will be killed if she stays."

Old campaigners, the Smolus waked at once. Then, when we gathered in the hall, slowly, inch by inch, without more than the faintest of creaks, the girl pushed up the window. We four, hardly daring to breathe, in the mean time glared with hot eyeballs down the stairway, prepared to spring like panthers if need be.

Kober crawled out first, then the girl, then Dmitri. To him Boris and I handed rough bags and rifles, he in turn passing them to the girl on the middle of the ladder and she to Kober at the base.

The ladder was cleared. I motioned Boris to depart. After crawling through the window he turned. Fear blazed in his eyes.

At his unspoken warning, I leaped aside without even turning to glance over my shoulder. A club smashed glancingly against my unflung arm, numbing it. I pivoted, raging, bringing up my right fist with all the force at my command. It caught the huge figure of the innkeeper, rising like a jack-in-the-box out of the stairwell, square on the point of the jaw. He bellowed, toppled backward, struck the wall at the turn, and continued to fall. A bump, a yell in another voice, the crash of the door at the base of the stairs.

"Good!" thought I. "He fell on another."

Boris made haste to descend, and I scrambled through the window and followed. The ladder began to sway when I was midway in my descent. I looked up. A pair of hands were thrust through the window, gripping the uprights and attempting to shove the ladder out from the wall. I dropped. The ladder fell over backward, barely missing my head. An evil, drunken face appeared in the dark aperture above. Kober fired; the man groaned and fell forward limply across the ledge.

I saw the girl running forward across the crusted snow toward the front of the inn.

"Come back," called Kober. "You'll be killed."

He darted after her. Her voice rose in a wail:

"I must go to him. Oh, what have I done?"

As she reached the corner, there came the report of a rifle. The girl swayed, staggered and fell to the ground.

Like a wild boar, his great thatch of hair and bushy beard a-bristle with rage, the innkeeper leaped from the shelter of the wall and launched a kick at the body of the fallen woman. Kober fired, and the brute fell across her body.

Then they were upon us. We were at the back of the inn, the stables behind us. Kober flung himself down at his corner and began to shoot rapidly. I raced to the other corner as a dark form appeared, which I brought down with a lucky shot. The Smolus guarded the kitchen door and a small window beside it, both in the face of that rear wall. Nobody appeared there.

Kober ceased to fire. I poked my cap around the corner on the end of my rifle, and when it drew no fire I ventured to peer out. Only that one body, so close I could touch it. Evidently the assassins, finding us prepared for them, had drawn off to take council.

Now was our chance. I turned and called to Boris to leave the task of guarding the kitchen approaches to his brother and to begin saddling the horses. He dragged the rough bags into the stable, and I could hear him moving about, could hear the stamping of the horses. The wait seemed interminable. Still nothing from the enemy. Then Boris called to us that all was ready.

Kober was kneeling in the snow, a hand over the girl's heart. I dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Dead, Alexis. We can do nothing for her."

He stood up and touched his cap in salute. Well, it was sad. But I shall never understand women.

As we dashed away from the inn, squat, sinister, dark, in the midst of that little valley, snow up to its walls, the comb of trees at the back bare and rigid against the clouds, we bent low in our saddles. Not a shot was fired. The rascals had had enough. Still lay the place, as if death ruled inside as well as without.

Up the hill we rode, the forest closing about us, and snow began to fall. It was as if Nature purposed to provide a winding-sheet for the poor girl.

For several hours we continued pushing ahead through the storm, finding no houses, no villages, but only the crowding trees. At length, exhausted, we turned aside from the road and made our way up a wooded ravine through which a frozen stream provided a pathway.

In a little hollow we made camp, and while the Smolus prepared the *naida* Kober and I cut fir boughs for the shelter. Planting two forked branches beside the fire-logs, we fitted into them a crosspiece about three feet above the ground and on it rested the ends of poles running back to the slope of the hollow. Over this the fir boughs were spread, and then we all crept within, even Kober, whose turn it was to watch, and soon we were warm as toast and asleep.

VII

THREE days later we were in Kharkov without having experienced any further adventures, and there as we had expected we found Czecho-Slovak troop-trains in the railroad station. Our first interest, of course, was to turn over the three million rubles to the proper authorities, and we were fortunate enough to find a committee of Delegates traveling with the troops who were thankful indeed to receive the money.

Here we four separated, the Smolus receiving the rank of sergeants as reward and joining a command. Kober and I were promised promotion at a later date. The troops were of the Second Division, having come up from the Province of Poltava, and as this was the division to which Kober was attached he made inquiry and was delighted to learn his company was reported at a station some twenty miles to the south and was expected to arrive soon. As for me, being separated from my command, the Delegates attached me to their side as an aide.

"Now to hear the news," said Kober that night. "They tell me Sirowy is here. We'll hunt him up and find out at first hand what has happened since we left Kiev."

Our old Prague playmate and brother officer in the Twenty-Eighth Prague Regiment, whom I had not seen since Ishim prison days, was a lieutenant in the Seventh. We found him in a troop-train on the outskirts of the city. One end of a box car had been curtained off as a sort of clubroom by Sirowy and other young Czech subalterns, and it was in this place, lighted by candles on the table and here and there along the walls, that we found our old friend in the midst of a half-dozen young Czechs.

For a moment as we entered we stood unnoticed. They were going it at a great rate. Every tongue seemed wagging. Then we advanced and Sirowy saw us. Well, I tell you, we thumped each other.

"What luck!" cried Sirowy. "And where in the world have you dropped from?"

"Shall we tell him?" asked Kober, glancing at me.

I nodded. Kober loves to relate his adventures, but as he does it well there can be no objection to that. We were introduced to the others, and at once Kober found his stride. I have never heard him tell a story better than he related our adventures that night by candlelight. But if an audience counts for anything, he had every incentive to gripping recital, for those young fellows literally hung upon his words.

"And now," said he, laughingly waving aside the flood of questions poured upon us at his conclusion, "Alexis and I are dying to hear the news. Remember, we have been cut off from the troops almost a month. Tell us what has happened. We have seen few papers, and they were not very informative. As for the peasants we encountered, they know next to nothing of what is going on."

"Well," said Sirowy, "it's hard to make a beginning, so much has happened. Things look dark for us, too. But here goes."

With that he began bringing our information up to date. And as he proceeded, interrupted now and again by others, we saw that indeed much had happened during our absence, and likewise that our affairs might be considerably brighter. More than once as he proceeded, too, I was reminded of M. Benet's prophecy back at Moscow.

To begin with, of course, was the outstanding fact, dwarfing all else, that the Bolsheviks both of Ukrainia and Moscow had made peace with the Central Empires at Brest-Litovsk March 3. Yet this news, which had been flashed all around the civilized world, had failed to penetrate to the huts of the Russian peasants, and we had been in ignorance of it.

Our forces had been hard pressed in retreat by the Germans and Austrians, particularly the First Division. Forewarned that the peace of Brest-Litovsk was in the making, the Central Empires had flung fifteen or sixteen divisions across the border before peace could be signed for the purpose of making an immense raid on Ukrainia and sweeping up the vast stores of military supplies, artillery, clothing, canned food, etc., which had been abandoned by the Bolsheviks. That so much wealth should have been left unguarded seems unbelievable, yet it is the truth that in those closing days of the war so completely had Bolshevism demoralized the Russian ranks that nobody any longer felt any sense of responsibility.

Not only the confiscation of all these stores, left in unguarded warehouses, abandoned on railroad sidings, but also the destruction of our troops, was the object of the Germans. They feared to let us escape: First, because we would sweep up ahead of us much of this wealth and save it from falling into their grasp; second, because disciplined troops at large in Russia and in control of the Trans-Siberian Railway would interfere with their plans to draw upon Siberia for supplies.

Farther removed from the front, the Second Division was able to elude the pursuit with comparative ease, and now at Kharkov and in the vicinity was beyond the reach of the Germans. But the First Division was not so fortunate. Without railroad equipment, forced to flee afoot, the rear guard was caught at the crossing of the Dnieper. That we already had learned from M. Benet. What we did not know before, however, was that fifty miles beyond

Kiev, at the station of Bakmatch, an entire German division making an encircling movement had struck at the railroad with the threat of piercing it and cutting off the retreat of the major portion of the First Division, which was still to the south.

Colonel Cervinka of the Fourth Regiment was at Bakmatch when scouts brought word of the approach of the Germans from the west. He had less than four thousand men. One battalion had only five hundred and eighty bayonets and two machine guns. Thus the odds against him were five to one.

To the west, however, was a great marsh through which the Germans must pass, and on the near side a range of low hills. Rushing his men to these hilltops, Colonel Cervinka entrenched opposite the paths through the marsh and for three days resisted all attempts of the Germans to break through his line. Toward the end of the third day two companies of artillery coming up along the railroad went to his assistance, and the Germans were decisively routed.

None of those present in the car had been at Bakmatch, but they knew all that had occurred, for the word had been telegraphed. Our losses had been severe enough, amounting to four hundred killed and almost an equal number wounded. Yet the German loss was far greater, they said, two thousand dead being counted. To cover their failure the Germans had announced they had taken eleven thousand prisoners.

"And to think," laughed Sirowy, in conclusion, "we had less than four thousand men engaged!"

One result of the Battle of Bakmatch had been to provide the First Division with not only trains for all but even with a surplus. In the vicinity of Bakmatch alone were found twenty-seven locomotives and seven hundred and fifty box cars, while as the troops proceeded hundreds of abandoned locomotives were found at stations and on sidings, and more than one thousand freight-cars crammed with supplies consisting of ammunition, rifles, flour, sugar, canned provisions, uniforms, gasoline, a number of cannon and several dismantled airplanes.

This and other abandoned war material to the value of a milliard of rubles was swept up by our advancing troops and thus preserved from falling into the hands of the Germans. What we needed for ourselves, both railroad equipment and other supplies, was appropriated, our Delegates undertaking to make a settlement for them with the Bolsheviks at Moscow. The balance, by far the larger part, was carried along by the troops to be turned over to the Bolsheviks at Kursk. That city, about one hundred and twenty-five miles north of Kharkov, said Sirowy, was the junction point at which it had been decided that the First Division troops coming up from the southwest through Kiev and Bakmatch should unite with those of the Second Division coming up from the Poltava front through Kharkov.

Thence the united corps was to proceed by leaps eastward to Penza, Samara and then Cheliabinsk, where it would strike the main line of the Trans-Siberian Railway. At Kursk, Penza, Samara and Cheliabinsk, the latter the first Siberian city beyond the Urals and fifteen hundred miles east of Kiev, it was understood that General Dieterichs and the vanguard of our forces which earlier had proceeded toward Vladivostok would have set up supply stations for us. From Cheliabinsk it was planned to evacuate us as quickly as possible across the broad land of Siberia, a distance of more than four thousand miles, so that we could sail from Vladivostok in time to reach France for the Summer campaign of the Allies.

Now that the battle of Bakmatch not only had ensured the safe withdrawal of all our troops from the German clutch but likewise had provided us with the necessary railroad equipment, Sirowy and his comrades seemed to believe the way lay clear before us to a successful carrying-out of these plans, except for lack of Bolshevik cooperation. Even that, however, they seemed inclined to minimize. The Bolsheviks at Moscow had agreed to our withdrawal and had promised to furnish the necessary railroad equipment. While this they had failed to do, perhaps as much through lack of ability due to the prevailing chaos obtaining on the railroads as to unwillingness, yet now the troops had provided themselves with trains.

It is true, in the main these were only *teplushkas* or box cars. Even with windows sawn out of the sides and rude berths fitted up they would not make the best of traveling homes. Certainly they would be uncomfortable in cold weather, and Spring that year of 1918 seemed slow in arriving. Yet the worst rigors of Winter were past, and long before another Winter closed down on the Siberian steppes and high plateaus we expected to be far away in France.

So at least we thought. So we said to each other, sitting there in that box car on a railroad siding at Kharkov that March night. Little did we know what lay ahead, that not only one Winter but two would come and go before we dropped Vladivostok behind, that many of us would leave our bones on the Siberian steppes or in the far-flung *taiga*. Little did we realize the times without number when we would get out into the deep snow and push those same box cars up a five-mile grade by hand because the engines, worn and racked, could not pull them.

"So you see," concluded Sirowy, after telling us how matters stood, "we might be better off, and again we might be worse. The Bolsheviks are not cooperating very heartily in our withdrawal, but at least they have given consent. We are free now of the Germans, and it's ho for Vladivostok!"

"Ho for Vladivostok!" cried several of the young fellows, and one, jumping to his feet, raised a glass of thin wine, and the rest of us also got up and drained the balance of our drink to the toast.

After that the party broke up, the young fellows going to their various trains. But Kober and I, who were to bunk with Sirowy on the floor here, sat and talked a long time. To us, recalling M. Benet's words at Moscow, prophesying Bolshevik treachery toward us, the trend of affairs seemed to augur ill. Certainly the Ukrainian Government was pro-German; certainly the Germans had not sent Lenin into Russia without expecting to see their own ends served.

Although we had succeeded in eluding the German armed forces, would the Kaiser be content to let us escape without attempting to halt our progress in some other fashion? To me at least it seemed improbable. And how could such an attempt come except through manipulation of the Bolsheviks?

It was with a troubled mind that I finally sank to sleep, wrapped in a blanket and outstretched on a board of the floor.

VIII

THOSE fears with which I had lain down to sleep stayed with me, and events during succeeding days went merely to confirm and strengthen them. Instead of moving out of Kharkov toward Kursk, the troops received orders next day to remain. All troop movements of the Second Division moving up behind us likewise were halted, we learned. Sirowy brought the news as I sat on the step of his *teplushka*, mending a boot-heel before hunting up my Delegates and reporting for duty.

"See if you can find out why our echelons are being held up, Alexis," he said. "Why be an aide to the Delegates if you can't get the news for your friends, the inside news?"

I laughed, stamped once or twice to make sure the boot-heel was restored well enough to serve and strolled up through the cluttered railroad yards of Kharkov to find the headquarters train.

When I say cluttered, I speak advisedly. Scores of box cars in all states of disrepair stood about on tracks. Some still bore loads of merchandise, although the majority had been emptied. There was plenty of evidence in many cases to indicate that the emptying process had been carried on by vandals, for doors were burst open, sides broken in.

Numerous locomotives also stood around idle, rusting, their bell-shaped smoke-stacks looking grotesque against the blue sky. Russian railroad employees, like workmen of every class, were too busy looting, playing the game of Red Guardsman, or just talking, to think of work.

This fact alone militated against the speedy withdrawal we desired, for without plenty of railroad men how could our trains move briskly? Of necessity we could not man the trains ourselves as matters stood, but must depend on the Russians. Otherwise there would be wrecks and smash-ups without number. No; unless we seized the entire railroad system we must depend on the Russians.

Here and there, drawn up on a sidetrack, stood one of our long echelons; and it did my heart good as I passed to hear the old Czech songs come floating out along with the smell of breakfast being cooked. The men at least were not down-hearted, as in the brisk early morning air they cooked breakfast over fires in the snow beside the tracks or upon a rude stove set up inside with a piece of pipe sticking out the roof and belching wood smoke.

An echelon, I should explain, is a railroad transport detachment. Following customary European army practise, our troops were divided into such detachments as fast as railroad equipment could be obtained. Such an echelon carries a battalion—about eight hundred men. Thus frequently the terms "echelon" and "battalion" became used amongst us interchangeably as time went on.

The Delegates welcomed me, and I was invited to share in their breakfast; but as already I had eaten bread, bacon and coffee with Sirowy and Kober I declined. Then while the half-dozen assembled rattled away, serving themselves democratically from the top of a stove on which one of their number who boasted a knowledge of cooking had prepared the food, I sat back smoking my pipe and listening.

They were young fellows all, elected by the regiments of the Second Division, except Michaelis, the only one with whom I had previously been acquainted. He had been a Czech resident in Moscow before the war where he had published a newspaper for compatriots living in Russia. During our prison years he had devoted his services and those of his paper to propaganda in our behalf, and had been not without influence in swaying Kerensky to grant permission for us to organize our own corps.

That Kerensky had insisted on our major officers being Russians and on ourselves forming an integral part of the Russian Army had been a blow to him. I knew, for he had told me so in conversations. However, he sensibly pointed out, half a loaf was better than none.

The others present were young Czech sub-lieutenants and lieutenants, men of my own age and experience. Between them and the Russian officers in command of the troops already was beginning to be felt a little strain. Our sole idea at this time was to get out of Russia as quickly as possible, and accordingly on the advice of President Masaryk, who had come from France to advise us and who shortly was to return, we Czechs and Slovaks were taking no part in the political discussions of the day.

The Russian officers, on the other hand, were either monarchists or moderates of the Kerensky party and were bitter against the Bolsheviks. From the conversation of the Delegates I gathered that they feared these Russian officers would excite the animosity of the Bolsheviks toward us and thus delay our withdrawal, for the Bolsheviks controlled the railroads and could place numerous obstacles in our way.

It was not the placing of such obstacles, however, which had tied up the movements of the Second Division beyond Kharkov, I learned. Word had arrived from the First Division leaders by telegraph that the railroad beyond Bakmatch toward Kursk was so cluttered up with trains and supplies abandoned by the disorganized Russian troops who had fled ahead of the onsweeping Germans that the division would be slow to arrive. The First Division leaders naturally would not leave this material to fall into the hands of their pursuers, but intended to sweep it ahead of them to be turned over to Russian authorities.

The probability was therefore that our plans for a union of the two divisions at Kursk would have to be revised, and that not until Penza would the troops com together. This therefore was the word I took back to Sirowy.

We talked the matter over before Kober left to make his way to the rear to join his company. It was the consensus that, despite this change of plan, delay would be only temporary. Penza was a thousand miles beyond Kiev, and certainly the railroad would be clear beyond that point.

This was what we told ourselves in our ignorance, unable to see the machinations going on up at Moscow between the Germans and Bolsheviks. The Germans at first had laughed at the possibility of our withdrawing across Siberia to Vladivostok as we planned. They had considered it a romantic adventure doomed to failure.

Now they saw us about to triumph over the troops they had flung against us, over railroad disorganization. We must be halted. Otherwise how could Germany hope to rush through her plans for repatriating hundreds of thousands of her subjects who had been captured and sent into Siberia? Or how seize the Trans-Siberian Railway in time to hasten supplies out of Siberia to her starving armies and population? Accordingly, as we later learned, the notorious German Count Mirbach, later assasinated, was even at this very time exerting pressure on Lenin and Trotzky up at Moscow to put obstacles in our way.

He was telling them that Germany and

Austria-Hungary would consider it an unfriendly act on the part of their new allies, the Bolsheviks, with whom they had just made peace at Brest-Litovsk, to permit us to escape in order that we might fling ourselves against the Germans in France and Belgium. And more insidiously he was playing upon the damage we would cause the Bolsheviks themselves if permitted at large with weapons in our hands.

It was rumored and believed all over Russia that we numbered not less than three hundred thousand. Such an armed host, not in sympathy with Bolshevism, Count Mirbach said to Lenin and Trotzky, might easily become a rallying-point for conservative and republican elements of the Russian population and the scattered bands of Russian officers still holding together. Were we to come out suddenly against the Bolsheviks, what could halt our march on Moscow?

These were the arguments which I say we later learned Count Mirbach was all this time employing at Moscow. And although we did not know about them, their effect was soon felt.

The first manifestation of growing Bolshevik unfriendliness occurred at Kursk when the advance guard of the First Division moving up from Bakmatch arrived. A Colonel Anton, commanding the local Soviet garrison, demanded that our troops surrender all their arms before he would permit them to proceed, declaring an order to that effect had arrived from Moscow.

At the prospect of being compelled to give up their weapons and leave themselves defenseless the troops muttered mutinously. But the leaders were determined to keep the peace and complied—only they turned over merely some of the salvaged war material which it had been intended to restore to the Russians in any event, assuring Colonel Anton these were their weapons. When shoemakers and tailors become military leaders overnight one can tell them anything, and Colonel Anton believed.

The troop-trains thereupon rolled through Kursk on their way to Penza, three hundred miles to the east, where they were to meet with the Second Division. But President Masaryk, still lingering in Russia, realized mischief was afoot. He saw clearly that this incident at Kursk was merely the opening gun in a Bolshevik campaign. Whither it would lead could not yet be seen, but that it spelled breakers ahead for us was undeniable. Accordingly President Masaryk went to Moscow personally to interview Lenin and Trotzky.

The Bolshevik Premier seemed as eager to have us depart quickly as we to withdraw, and he gave President Masaryk a written order which Trotzky countersigned calling upon Bolshevik commanders and Soviet authorities everywhere to facilitate the forward movements of our troops.

But when on March 24, six days after leaving Kursk, the First Division advance guards reached Penza a day before arrival of the Second Division coming up from Kharkov, what was their surprise on being informed by the Penza Soviet that they would have to disarm completely before being permitted to proceed. In view of the contrary order given President Masaryk by the Soviet chiefs this was staggering. But when informed of the order given Masaryk, the Bolshevik commander displayed a telegram from Moscow ordering our complete disarmament.

Then at last we all began to see the Bolsheviks were playing a double game, and that by fair promises they were hoping to keep us pacified until we could be disarmed and rendered helpless. Of course a plausible reason was given for depriving us of arms; we were told the Soviet authorities feared there might be malcontents in our ranks, thieves and robbers such as form part of every army, who would use their weapons to loot and murder on their way through Russia. But that the real reason for these orders was a plan on the part of the Bolsheviks to render us defenseless as the first step in a scheme which as yet we could not fathom, was plain.

Delegates from all troop units in the vicinity hastened at once to Penza, to confer with the Soviet officials. Mindful of President Masaryk's injunction to do nothing which could be construed as interference in Russian internal affairs, the Delegates were loth to break with the Bolsheviks. Equally unwilling were they, too, to see us disarmed. Therefore an attempt was to be made in conference to find some way out of this seeming impasse.

I arrived at Penza with the Second Division Delegates on the first day of the conference, but it was little enough of the sessions that fell to my lot to see. Instead, along with other aides I was assigned to the duty of disseminating orders to all our echelons approaching Penza by both railway lines to halt in their tracks. Many of us believed it would have been far better to concentrate all our troops possible at Penza and throw down the gage at once to the Bolsheviks. But the Penza Soviet demanded that the troops be halted pending the outcome of negotiations, and the Delegates, desirous of keeping the peace, complied.

While the conference was in progress practically all the Russian officers of our corps resigned their commands and left us. Their presence had been a drag upon us, and for this reason we were not so sorry to see them depart as might be, despite the fact that in the main they were a good enough sort.

As I said before, it was our object generally to avoid friction with the Bolsheviks, and this it was not always possible to do so long as the Russians officered us. They could not bring themselves to deal diplomatically with the various local Soviets *en route* with whom it had been necessary to conduct endless negotiations before our echelons could proceed from one station to another. In fact, the Soviets with their grandiloquent assumption of "democracy" had displayed savage contempt for our Russian officers, a contempt which the latter returned in kind.

Now, moreover, in their carefully planned campaign to render us stranded and defenseless, the Bolsheviks warned these Russian officers that their further association with us would be construed unfavorably. As the men had families or property or both in Bolshevik territory, they decided almost to a man to leave us and render lip service at least to Bolshevism in order to protect their relatives and their property.

To the Soviets undoubtedly it seemed that withdrawal of our Russian officers would be a blow to us. The contrary was the case. Czechs and Slovaks immediately were placed in positions of command, and the morale of the troops was enormously increased thereby. Our sub-lieutenants, lieutenants and captains were not officially designated majors and colonels in place of the departing Russians, but assumed those positions in an acting capacity, while men from the ranks of non-commissioned officers and privates rose to lieutenancies. At once, moreover, training-schools for officers were established aboard some of the echelons, under direction of men who like myself had been trained in the Austrian Army, in order that when we eventually reached France we would be in a position to take the field at once.

In the meantime after day-and-night sessions lasting three days the Penza conference came to an end with the agreement that our echelons should surrender all batteries and weapons of whatever sort with the exception of one hundred and sixty-eight rifles and one machine gun for each train, one hundred rounds of ammunition to the rifle. This compromise was something won, yet against armed troops we would be little better than defenseless.

Realizing this, the men themselves undertook to take their own steps toward protection. Numerous echelons possessing a surplus of war material from the salvaged supplies hid rifles, ammunition, hand grenades and even dismantled machine guns in partitions hastily constructed against the inside walls of the box cars. This bit of strategy they were able to carry out without arousing Bolshevik suspicion, inasmuch as they had the proper number of weapons which would be called for to hand over. Not all our echelons, however, possessed surplus munitions, and these perforce were left after surrendering their weapons with only the one hundred and sixty-eight rifles authorized by the agreement.

Now came the second move. Hard on the heels of the Penza conference arrived another order from Moscow, this time aimed at destroying our solidarity. Concentration of two or more troop-trains at any one station was forbidden, on the ground that otherwise railroad traffic would be impeded. Once more our Delegates bowed to the order, still anxious only to keep peace with the Bolsheviks and get us all safely out of this topsy-turvy land.

Our advance trains began to move forward again, but only at a snail-like pace. Although the Moscow Government was everywhere acknowledged, yet each local Soviet, jealous of its own authority, acted like an independent republic.

In order to facilitate negotiations we hit upon the plan of bidding for Bolshevik favor by adopting their political forms. Thus we elected commissars to conduct all dealings with the local Soviets. That these commissars invariably were our own officers was not known to the Russians.

But even this availed little. The commissars were forced to exercise the limit in patience in negotiating with the Soviet officials of every considerable town along the railroad for supplies and permission to proceed. And whenever a train was held up the Russians would telegraph back along the railroad ordering all other trains held up, so that the gaps between would not decrease.

Days and weeks passed before some of our rearmost trains were permitted to turn a wheel. March went out. April came and went. Still none of our echelons, except those composing General Dieterich's advance guard, had reached Vladivostok.

IX

ANXIOUS as we were during these two months between the middle of March and the middle of May—at which time came the final break with the Bolsheviks and the beginning of open hostilities between our pigmy band and the forces of an empire in the heart of which we were immured—it must not be imagined that we spent all our time moping or discussing the slow development of events.

We were young fellows for the most part. The older Czechs and Slovaks whom Austria had conscripted and flung into battle in the closing years of the war had been slower to respond to the call for volunteers when Kerensky granted us permission to organize our corps among the Czecho-Slovak prisoners of war in Russia's hands. They were still scattered through south-eastern Russia and Siberia, whence later they were to make their way to us and swell our ranks from the forty-five thousand with which we left the Russian-German front to the hundred thousand which finally two years later left Vladivostok.

And, being young, we were not especially given to down-heartedness despite the storm-clouds gathering about us. The Second Division Delegates, with whom I had worked for a time, left us after Penza and made their way faster than our echelons could travel into Siberia, where they foregathered with the majority of our National Council at the city of Cheliabinsk, a short distance east of the Urals. So I was unable to rejoin my old First Division command and stayed on with Sirowy. And as I look back upon those two months during which we slowly crawled across eastern Russia and into the Ural mountains it seemed like a very peaceful time indeed—a calm before the storm which was about to break upon us.

For days at a time when we would be held up we would get out into the fields, from which the snow had disappeared, and would kick a football about. Sometimes we would select teams and pit them against each other. There would be long rambles afoot through the thawing countryside to this or that local point of interest, perhaps some hilltop which promised a wider outlook.

At night there was always a singsong going on somewhere in the eighteen or twenty cars of our train, and frequently more than one. Numbers of the fellows had violins, accordions or mandolins, and the rest would gather about and sing. Then how the old Czech songs, which had kept our language alive during the centuries when at one time or another it was proscribed by the Austrians, would ring out across the darkened landscape! In hills, forests, plains or Volga marshes, no matter where our echelon happened to be halted, we sang.

There was always, too, the cheerful sounds of hammer and saw being plied, for the men busied themselves during these lazy days in fitting out their inhospitable *teplushkas* with benches, tables and berths. Forty men to a box car was our allotment; and forty men, inspired by each others' example, can make an empty interior turn into a presentable traveling home.

And though I can speak at first hand only of the echelon with which I traveled, yet in all other echelons it was the same—the football matches, the gymnastic exercises *en masse* in fields when the Russian peasants would stare in stupefaction while we swung arms and legs and moved like one great piece of machinery through those intricate Sokol exercises learned on playing-fields and in gymnasiums at home; the painstaking attempts to make a home out of a box car; the homesick singing about camp-fires outdoors at night or, if it rained, within a candle-lighted box car, times when many a young fellow's voice choked on the sobs rising in his throat as old memories, old scenes, the faces of loved ones, suddenly materialized to unman him.

All the time the net of circumstances drawing us into conflict with the Bolsheviks was steadily drawing tighter. One thing which acted to arouse ill-feeling between us and the local Soviets was the way in which our protection was sought by terrorized victims of Bolshevik brutality.

The immense depths of the slime into which Russia was sinking could not fail to be apparent to us. Centralized Government and orderly rule had been swept away. In their place was organized, legalized murder and rapine. Roving bands of *Jacquerie* robbed, slew, committed unspeakable crimes in the country districts, all in the name of the Brotherhood of Man. In the cities the lowest of brutes flocked to the banner of fanatic theorists because it enabled them to do evil under the cloak of authority.

Almost daily we encountered fresh evidences of cultured people reduced to beggary and starvation. Sometimes in the forests when we would go out for a ramble we would come quite suddenly on the bodies of former Army officers, who had fled here for refuge and had been hunted down, hanging from the trees. Such sights always made me a little sick. Once in a Volga marsh early in May when the trees were just beginning to cover their nakedness with tender, downy leaves we passed quite close in the train to fifty bodies hanging from the limbs.

As I say, in their extremity of terror, not knowing where else to turn to escape persecution, some of the hunted sought shelter of us. Our own echelon carried a number of refugees, and we knew that with the other trains it was the same.

Sometimes it would be a good-looking widow with a baby in her arms, who begged to be taken in. I remember such a case. The poor woman's husband had fallen at the front, fighting to the last with one of the few units of the old Russian Army which remained steadfast. But to the brutish commissar who coveted her that meant merely that she was without protection from his advances.

Officers of the old Army, intelligentsia, university students, priests and nuns, merchants and shopkeepers, young women with beauty and old men with wealth, all were hounded by these rascals whose lust for women, gold and blood was unbridled. No matter what the station into which rolled our own and other echelons, night would find some white-faced, terror-stricken man or woman come creeping out of the darkness to beg shelter.

As nobody was turned away, soon our trains crawling slowly eastward held each its complement of refugees. When these were women, a curtain would be stretched across one end of a car, made of an old tent or tarpaulin or pieces of sacking stitched together, behind which they could find privacy. In their gratitude the women would cook and sew for their protectors.

Many were the romances which blossomed as a result. Numerous young soldiers married Russian wives and carried them along through all our subsequent campaigns and home again to Bohemia.

Perhaps the most outstanding incident, certainly the one which brought us into closest approach to conflict with the Bolsheviks, occurred at Kuznetsk, a town of twenty thousand between Samara and the Urals in eastern Russia. I was not present, but word of the affair spread through all our ranks in time. And as I have spoken with men who were present, my account may be taken for the truth.

When an echelon commanded by a young subaltern, Lieutenant Czenka — he was killed in the fighting about Irkutsk the following Winter—arrived at Kuznetsk late in April a delegation of panicky townspeople waited at once on the commander.

Ordinarily the Russians are a people filled with language, and before they can express what is on their minds the listener is inundated in a flood of words. But this time the spokesman, an oldish man whose cheeks were gaunt, whose clothes were shabby and frayed, but in whose fine eyes blazed a fire of combined horror and determination, came directly to the point without preamble.

That very day, he declared, the Kuznetsk Soviet had pasted big posters all over the town announcing that the young women were to be nationalized.

"It is an order," said the spokesman, his throat working, "that we parents of Kuznetsk must bring our young daughters to Soviet headquarters tomorrow, where they will be registered, then turned over to the Red Guards in barracks."

More than a score of men and women of

Kuznetsk had braved the wrath of the Soviet officials by coming to appeal to the Czechs, and as Lieutenant Czenka gazed at their careworn faces and shabby forms there in the dusk on the station platform, I imagine he was thinking of his own old mother and father in similar position. It is the way a man of decent instincts would regard the situation. To run the risk of open conflict with a Soviet would be to violate orders and perhaps precipitate general hostilities between the Bolsheviks and other echelons than his own.

But the young commander did not hesitate. How could he, looking into those appealing eyes, thinking of the young girls who faced worse than death?

He summoned all the men of the echelon to a conference on the tracks, there beside the train. Realizing something unusual was forward, they deserted preparations for supper and came boiling out of the cars in response to the messenger's call of "All out."

From the steps of a *teplushka* Lieutenant Czenka explained the situation while the Russians stood below him, anxiously awaiting the soldiers' decision. It was a matter, said the young officer, in which he did not feel free to issue orders. He would leave it to the soldiers to decide what action, if any, to take. For his part, however, it was his opinion they should go the limit.

He recommended they send a delegation to the Soviet at once with the command to tear down the posters and abandon this contemplated outrage or suffer the consequences. He volunteered, not in official capacity as officer in command of the echelon, but merely as an individual member of the detachment, to form one of such a committee.

With a roar the soldiers endorsed his plan. Half a dozen leaders among the men were thrust forward at once, and these with Lieutenant Czenka set out immediately to hunt up the Soviet officials and issue their ultimatum. In the mean time the others hastened away, all thought of supper forgotten for the time being, to muster what arms they could and prepare for a fight if the Soviet proved obdurate.

What made matters ticklish was the fact that this was one of the echelons not provided with surplus war material which could be hidden away at the time of the Penza disarmament. The eight hundred could muster little more than the one hundred and sixty-eight rifles allowed by the agreement. A number, however, had revolvers besides. And all without firearms of one sort or another gathered clubs and stones. As a matter of fact, poorly armed though they were, I imagine they wished grimly that the Soviet would show fight.

Such was not the case, however. Presently the committee returned with word that their ultimatum had struck terror into the members of the Soviet. They spoke particularly of the president, a thin youngster with receding chin and close-set, beady eyes who before the war had clerked in a Kuznetsk dry-goods store and who had come safely through the fighting in the Quartermaster's Department. He had been quite pale when the Czechs ordered him around, and had been ready to sink through the floor. He had been ludicrous in his efforts to placate them, declaring the posting of the bills was all a mistake.

That the contrary was true, however, we learned later when the *Izvestia*, official organ of the Moscow Reds, was found to have carried announcements that not only the Kuznetsk Soviet but several others had ordered nationalization of women.

In order to ensure that the Soviet officials did not wreak vengeance on the suffering townspeople for their appeal to the Czechs, Lieutenant Czenka and his detachment dallied day after day at Kuznetsk. In fact, the troops were still there when the open break with the Bolsheviks came, and great was their pleasure in seizing the town. Moreover, it is probable that they would have strung up the Soviet members if they had been able to catch them.

In addition to such incidents, breeders of ill-feeling between ourselves and the Bolsheviks, were plenty of other evidences during these early Spring months that no matter what the result would be, a break must come soon. More and more obstacles to our forward movement were imposed by local Soviets. Bolshevik trainmen deserted us, frequently damaging the locomotives before departing. Fuel became harder to obtain, and we were compelled to resort to going into the forests and cutting wood to feed the engines. Farther and farther apart spread our echelons until by the middle of May from twenty to fifty miles yawned between any train and its nearest neighbor.

How we were scattered! In far-away Vladivostok was General Dieterichs with ten thousand troops. But that was the largest single command. Nowhere else had the Bolsheviks permitted us to concentrate. In single echelons, each widely separated from its neighbors, we were scattered from the rear guard still at Rkiscevo, not five hundred miles east of Kiev, to Irkutsk in central Siberia, a distance of three thousand miles, while between Irkutsk and Vladivostok was not a troop-train so far as we knew. Thus some thirty-nine thousand troops in forty-five troop-trains were scattered like beads on a string all across eastern Russia, through the Urals and upon that vast steppe of western Siberia ending in the foot-hills near Irkutsk.

Now if ever was the time for the Bolsheviks to strike. They had partially disarmed us. They had deprived us of experienced officers. They had isolated us in little ill-armed groups.

They struck. From Moscow came the order that all our troop-trains were to be halted. The excuse offered was that the Bolsheviks could not afford to continue conveying us to Vladivostok as we choked the Trans-Siberian Railway and obstructed the free movement of traffic.

We were to be faced about and evacuated *via* the Murmansk Peninsula in the far north. Finnish troops, moreover, it was said, were moving to cut the Murmansk railroad. And as we were still an integral part of the Russian Army (a bald untruth) we would be called upon to fight them.

Obviously this was a trap for the purpose of luring us back into European Russia, where we would be at the mercy of the better-organized Moscow Bolsheviks and their German allies. Our national council in session at Cheliabinsk sent an emphatic refusal and demanded that the original plan be carried out.

X

I DO not think there was ever an army so ill prepared as ours to meet such a blow as that which was about to fall upon us. We were so scattered that we could not support each other in case of attack, so ill armed in many cases that many would have to fight with sticks and stones until they could wrest weapons from the very hands of the enemy.

As to supreme command and coordinated effort, if it came to fighting, there could be none. At least not at first. Our nominal commander-in-chief, the Russian General Dieterichs, was at distant Vladivostok, separated by more than two thousand miles of enemy territory from his nearest units in the vicinity of Irkutsk.

At Cheliabinsk, it is true, was our National Council. But so far it was political rather than military. Besides, the moment hostilities began the Cheliabinsk Council would be hard put to it to communicate with our scattered echelons.

Telegraph and wireless communication between our echelons was still possible, but only by courtesy of the Bolsheviks; and at any moment, actuated by secret orders from Moscow, the Reds might close the wires to us and strike. Then each echelon would be entirely cut off from communication with its fellows; and though some might resist successfully, that all could do so seemed dubious indeed. Only by a miracle could we be saved from annihilation.

Worst of all features of the situation was our ignorance of what to expect. It was apparent that for two months the Bolsheviks had step by step been moving to render us defenseless. But for what purpose? How would the blow fall? Now that our Cheliabinsk Council refused to agree to the return of our echelons to European Russia for the purpose of evacuating *via* Murmansk, what would be the Bolshevik reply?

In the midst of these general alarms and anxieties, I received a telegram summoning me to Cheliabinsk. Our echelon at that time was at Ufa, some three hundred miles west of the Urals and the Russian terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

An east-bound train for civilians was in the station and due to depart that night. If I could manage to get aboard it, with luck I would be in Cheliabinsk within a day or two.

Sirowy and I talked the matter over, discarding at once any idea that I travel in my true identity. To go disguised as a Bolshevik seemed the only logical course, inasmuch as in the state of public excitement a solitary Czech would run the danger of seizure and imprisonment. But as a

Bolshevik, although my knowledge of Russian would make such disguise an easy matter, yet I would need a passport.

"We shall have to bribe the train officials," said Sirowy.

"With what?" said I hopelessly. "Have you a fortune in rubles?"

He shook his head.

"Vodka. Of the best."

At that I brightened. If Sirowy possessed good vodka, say a couple of bottles, the matter could be accomplished.

The pair of us set to work immediately with scissors, needle and thread, and soon my uniform was decked out with red stars and red arm-bands so that I could pass muster as a Soviet commissar. Then, taking my two bottles of vodka wrapped in a package, I bade good-by to my old friend and set out confidently to hunt up the conductor of the train.

Adopting an air of insolent importance, determined to command rather than crawl, I was received without question at my face value by the stationmaster, who even undertook to find the train conductor for me. When the latter came I drew him aside and introduced myself as Ivan Petrovski of Cheliabinsk Soviet, stating I had just discovered the loss of my passport and as the train was about to depart—I had waited purposely until the last moment when I saw the trainmen actually had up steam and that everybody was aboard—I did not have time to hunt up local Soviet officials and replace the loss.

Then I pressed the vodka upon him. His eyes glistened; he seized and hid the package under his coat and told me he would arrange matters.

"If any question arises," he said, "I'll say you entrusted your passport to me and I lost it. But your ticket?"

I pressed some money into his hand.

"Good," said he with a satisfied smile. "Now everything is arranged."

It was a slow journey, with many stops apparently for no reason at all, during which passengers would alight to stretch their legs up and down the tracks only to make frantic dashes when the train again got into motion without any warning from the officials. Half a dozen times in the daylight hours of the succeeding day we passed long trains of the familiar *teplushkas* which I had come to associate with our troops, stalled on sidings, and sure enough I could see our fellows loitering about, watching us go through with hungry glance. They, too, would like to be on their way, but the Moscow order halting us held them bound. I wondered what would come of it all.

The crowded train was filled with ordinary types, from whom nothing was to be gained in conversation, so I made myself look fierce and unapproachable the better to preserve my disguise. Every face appeared worried and worn with anxiety.

Why they were traveling, who could tell? Since the Revolution all Russia seemed on the move, shifting back and forth apparently without reason. Universal unrest possessed the people.

Two little Chinamen seemed from outward appearance at least the only persons aboard who did not worry. They slept on a platform between two cars, leaning against their blue duff bags most of the time, and their expressions seemed to say—

"Put us off when we get to Manchuria, but don't bother us otherwise."

The Ural Mountains I had seen before, having crossed them frequently in my trips as organizer among the Czecho-Slovak prison camps prior to the Revolution. They are not very interesting. There is about them nothing of the grandeur of the American Rockies, the Austrian Alps or the Carpathians, with which I am familiar. They lack the height and splendor even of the Alleghenies. In fact, they more resemble the Dakota foothills, which I saw once on a western trip from New York for my Uncle Michael. Although there are here and there in them deep gorges and spreading forests, for the most part the Urals are just big round hills which the peasants cultivate in terraces clear to the summits.

Two nights and a day it took us to travel the three hundred-odd miles from Ufa to Cheliabinsk. On the morning of the second day, shortly after dawn, we were slowly drawing near. In fact, across a plain on the eastern side of the Urals we could see the chimneys of this city of seventy thousand and the tall stacks of the railroad shops which mark it as an important junction where the rail line from Ekaterinburg on the north comes down to join the main line of the Trans-Siberian. I stood on a platform, impatient to leap down and lose myself at the first opportunity among the Czechs whom I expected to find stalled in the railroad yards.

We were slowing down to enter the station. Suddenly I heard the distant sound of scattered rifle-shots, followed by an outburst of shouts. My heart rose into my throat. Had it come at last? Were the Bolsheviks attacking our troops? I leaned from the platform train to peer up the tracks.

Some distance ahead a long train of third-class coaches slowly grinding to a stop, while over the engine and into the cab swarmed a score of men with others running beside, and all looking mighty angry and determined. Our train was going at a snail's pace, curious heads at the windows. Then I saw that the men boarding the engine of that other train were Czechs.

"Here! What's the matter?" I cried, dropping to the ground and running up to them.

Eight or ten had swarmed into the cab and compelled the engineer to bring his train to a halt. Others standing below swung around at my call, scowling as they took me in.

No wonder. To them I looked like a Bolshevik commissar, even though I spoke their tongue. Hastily I explained, and their faces cleared. They told me the train was carrying German and Magyar ex-prisoners of war westward from Siberian prison camps to be repatriated, and that as it passed a Czecho-Slovak train on an opposite track bound eastward in the station, a German from the rear platform had flung an iron bar which had felled a Czech soldier standing on the tracks.

"It struck him on the head," said one. "He may have been killed. We didn't wait to find out, but ran up here to stop the train. Our comrades will tend to that German if they find him. Look."

He pointed. Down the track at the end of the German train a big crowd of Czechs was milling about while even as we gazed others tumbled from the rearmost car. Several more shots were fired from the train.

"Come on," called the spokesman. "They're shooting at our comrades."

We all broke into a run, but by the time we arrived on the scene the clash had ended. That it had been disastrous for us was plain. Some of our fellows were carrying away a number of bodies, and I learned later that in the two volleys fired by the Germans four of our men had been killed and a dozen wounded.

Our soldiers who had been loitering on the tracks when the outbreak occurred were unarmed. With stones as their only weapons they had boarded the German train, however, and had dragged out the offender and mauled him so severely that he died later of his injuries.

Several hundred Czechs and Slovaks were crowded together a little way from the German train, convulsed with rage but helpless against the armed Germans who had driven them off and who stood grouped about their train with weapons plainly showing. As I came up at a run other Czechs were arriving with rifles and revolvers.

The situation looked ugly. A deadly clash appeared inevitable; but at the moment of my arrival a detachment of Red Guards who had been on duty at the railroad station burst between the two opposing groups.

Slowly the two warring camps dissolved while an officer of the Red Guards took charge of the situation and began to ask questions of those nearest. It was plain he could not make head or tail of the matter, and I was about to volunteer my services as interpreter when just in time I remembered that cursed commissar's uniform. Anyway I saw Captain Ulrich, commanding officer of the Czech train, elbowing his way forward. So I slipped away to the rear and boarded Captain Ulrich's car to await him.

His surprise on his return at finding me, whom he had last seen at the front, was comical. But we did not waste much time in explanations, for I wanted to hear the outcome of the incident.

He was tremendously excited. Our losses filled him with sorrow and indignation. He could not sit still, but jumped to his feet and began striding up and down the little partitioned-off space at the end of a box car which had been assigned him. I had to pull up my long legs to prevent tripping him at the turn.

Red Guards had been placed aboard the German train, he said, and it was to be held in the railroad yards pending outcome of an inquiry which he had demanded the Soviet should conduct at once. He had sent word to the Cheliabinsk Council, apprising them of what had occurred.

Matters looked bad. It would be difficult to control our men, especially with the Germans in the vicinity. If the Cheliabinsk Soviet dealt justly, well and good. But would the Bolsheviks give us a fair deal?

After changing my clothes I left to report to our Delegates. Great excitement prevailed in the city, where distorted versions of the occurrence already had spread. From sympathetic glances thrown at me as I made my way through the streets I could see that the townspeople were favorable to us. That was nothing new; whether city or country dwellers, Russians generally were prejudiced in our favor at that time. But these cowed citizens, to be blunt, did not count. What attitude would the Soviet adopt?

We were soon to find out. Barely had I had a chance to report to our Council, sitting at the Cheliabinsk hotel, when word arrived that the Soviet which had convened and had summoned eye witnesses to the tragic affray at the station had incontinently thrown our soldiers into prison when they appeared.

Fifty Delegates were present in the hotel, almost all of whom were attending the hastily summoned Council, when this message of a fresh outrage arrived. Acting-Captain Gajda, still only a lieutenant in actual grade, who was present as representative of an echelon at Ekaterinberg, leaped to his feet, blue eyes flashing, beaked nose seeming to quiver with rage. I had heard of him, but had never encountered him before. His round, firm face and appearance of youth—he was only 27—coupled with a figure of only medium height, did not give much indication of the power he was shortly to exercise. But when he broke out in a strong determined voice a thrill went through me.

"We must demand their release at once," he said. "If the Soviet refuses, fight. This is the end."

From their anxious faces it was apparent that some at least of the Delegates doubted the wisdom of such forthright methods. But Captain Gajda prevailed, and I was sent speeding back to our echelon with word that the Delegates wanted a delegation of officers and men to wait on the Soviet with our demands. Captain Ulrich nodded approval and at once sent a score of men to Soviet headquarters.

What was our stupefaction to receive word presently that these, too, had been seized and thrown into jail. Without wasting time in sending a messenger to the Delegates I telephoned our hotel from the railroad station. I wish I could have seen Gajda. Certainly, however, his energetic advice again prevailed, for a messenger came speeding from the Delegates ordering Captain Ulrich to muster two hundred men with rifles and send them to the Soviet with demand for immediate release of our men.

This show of force frightened the Soviet. There were two thousand Red Guards in barracks, but the Soviet leaders did not call on them. Instead they released our men and apologized for their detention.

But we realized that this did not end the matter. With two thousand Red Guards to draw upon, as opposed to our two echelons of less than one thousand five hundred men, less than half of whom were armed, the Soviet was bound to make trouble.

It was now late in the afternoon, and Captain Ulrich after consultation with some of our Delegates decided to occupy the strong brick railroad station and seize the telegraph wires. This would serve the double purpose of preventing the Soviet from summoning other Red Guards to its assistance and also of enabling our Delegates to communicate with other echelons in the west. If we acted promptly, our seemingly harmless message in code would be delivered and would put our men on guard. For that a crisis in our affairs had arrived was only too apparent.

From the frightened telegrapher, however, we learned that the Soviet already had telegraphed Moscow a distorted account of the Cheliabinsk incident, throwing all the blame upon us. The telegrapher's copy of the message made it only too plain that we could expect little justice from either Cheliabinsk or Moscow.

The next morning, ignorant of the fact that we and not the Soviet now controlled the Cheliabinsk telegraph station, came Moscow's reply. It was Trotzky's famous (or infamous) Order Number 115, commanding that Czecho-Slovak troops everywhere be disarmed and interned and that if they resisted they "be confronted with the bloody penalty of shooting in masses by Soviet troops."

XI

GAJDA was right. This was the end. Our Delegates, convening in the railroad station under protection of our rifles, took the only possible course. From Trotzky's order there could be no appeal. It must be war between us, and victory would go to the side which struck first. The Delegates therefore lost no time in coming to the decision to order our scattered forces to seize the railroad and telegraph as the first step in cutting our way out of Siberia.

During the previous afternoon and night we had managed to put numbers of our echelons eastward toward Omsk and westward into the Urals and the Volga region on their guard by means of our telegraph messages in code, as we knew by their replies. We realized only too well that although at Cheliabinsk we had managed to intercept Trotzky's message through our lucky seizure of the telegraph station in the nick of time, elsewhere the message would have been received by the Bolsheviks to the westward.

Nevertheless, to our echelons behind us we again despatched code messages in the hope that some would be delivered, telling them of the Council's decision. Our interception of Trotzky's order at Cheliabinsk made it probable that territory to the east would be slow in receiving it as Moscow would now have to depend on wireless. So we sent code messages speeding in that direction with a feeling of confidence in their reception in time.

Gajda and others of the Delegates also undertook to make their way disguised as Bolsheviks to as many of our echelons as possible as an added precaution. Gajda reached Ekaterinburg, only one hundred miles to the northward, that same day aboard a train, and soon we began to hear of his exploits there and along another line of railroad connecting Ekaterinburg with Omsk in the middle of the steppes of western Siberia. Others traveled hundreds of miles by train or on horseback without detection, putting our scattered echelons on guard against Bolshevik treachery.

While we were thus occupied the Cheliabinsk Soviet naturally was not idle either. The city under Czarist rule had been a military concentration point. Three big brick barracks and an artillery park surrounding a parade ground stood on the outskirts to the north. For a time after the dissolution of the old Russian Army doubtless they had stood unoccupied. But now two thousand Red Guards and a company of artillery were stationed there.

That day—it was May 25—while our Council sat in earnest debate at the railroad station and we were flying about telegraphing, trying to get in touch with other echelons, speeding the departure of various Delegates who had volunteered to carry warning to other units of our scattered troops, we also kept an eye on these Soviet forces. A number of our men who like myself spoke Russian doffed their uniforms and went among the townspeople or else, as I had done previously, disguised themselves as Red Guards and boldly made their way to the barracks.

Had strict discipline obtained among the Reds they probably would have been detected. As it was, they managed to escape discovery and returned toward nightfall with word of unusual activity among the Red Guards. The last to arrive, moreover, said the Soviet had ordered an attack on the station to be delivered at four o'clock in the morning.

We decided to strike first. Leaving a screen of men on guard over our trains and the station property, the rest to the number of about one thousand five hundred made a wide circle about the town under cover of midnight and surrounded the barracks. While a picked company fell on the guards at the stables, we others crept up to the windows of the various barracks. And at the signal a volley was fired through the windows.

The night was overcast, a strong wind which hummed a rising tune blew out of the north, and we were going to be in for a storm. A better night for our purpose could not have been found. The wind carried away all sound of our approach, and the thick darkness hid our movements.

That our surprize had been complete was apparent from the howls of fear which arose within the particular barracks outside of which I crouched, with forms of comrades melting away to right and left in the gloom. Although not ten yards away, we could barely see the barracks ahead.

After the first volley we began creeping forward. The outlines of the building grew clearer. Only a minute or so had elapsed when a second volley was fired. We could hear the remaining panes of glass fall with a thin tinkling sound. Louder rose the howls of the frightened rascals.

I began to feel a sudden sense of elation, as if a weight had been lifted from me. Why, who were these men that we should fear them? They were without discipline; not a sentry had been posted, and that, too, despite the fact that in four hours they were planning to attack us.

Heavens, for us there was nothing to fear! No matter how many of them our little echelons would be compelled to fight in cutting their way out of Siberia, we would go through them like a rat through a cheese. For the first time my deepening depression at thought of the prospect ahead of us began to dissipate.

A white cloth appeared at a window. From somewhere in the darkness Captain Ulrich called a command to cease fire.

"Do you surrender?" he shouted as the last rifle ceased to speak and sudden silence fell upon us, although to right and left at the other barracks we could hear the popping of rifles and the muffled cries of the surprized Red Guardsmen.

"We surrender," shrieked a voice from the barracks.

It was too easy. In less than fifteen minutes we were in complete possession not only of the three barracks but also of the stables and artillery park. The two thousand Red Guardsmen were disarmed and penned into one barracks under strong guard. Thirty light field-pieces were captured, together with horses to pull them. In the barracks we found twelve thousand rifles and a big supply of ammunition. Our jubilation knew no bounds, for up to now less than a third of our one thousand six hundred men possessed rifles.

With plenty of rifles, unlimited ammunition and thirty field-pieces we felt as if we had nothing left to fear. It is true we had no artillerymen, for our two echelons comprised only infantry. But Krejcirik, a Delegate who had been an artillery lieutenant in the Austrian Army and who shortly rose to the rank of major in our legions, was present at Cheliabinsk, and he undertook to remedy our lack.

From among the infantrymen he selected a company of fellows who knew how to handle horses. That he made the first requisite, for he said an artilleryman who was not also a good hostler wasn't worth his salt. Then he began to train these men, and good marksmen he made of them in time.

What a difference came over Cheliabinsk with the rout of the Bolsheviks and our possession! I was up and down the streets of the town the next few days on business of the Delegates who made me a sort of errand-boy liaison officer, and Cheliabinsk seemed to change magically under my eyes. For all its considerable population and its importance as a railroad center, it looked like a frontier town with unpaved streets, wide and dusty, and low wooden houses interspersed here and there in the business district with two- and three-story structures of brick.

Before we captured the place few people had gone abroad and shops had been deserted, for the cowed citizens were afraid to show themselves. No man of intelligence or culture on leaving his home in the morning could tell whether he would return at night or would be dragged from the street by the Red Guards and taken before that blood-stained travesty of a court, the Revolutionary Committee or Cheka (Tzeka). And once there he composed himself to die beneath the bloody axes of butchers stripped to the waist in some dark and gloomy cellar. Or else, if he did manage to reach his own home safely at night, as likely as not he would find it pillaged and his wife and daughters dishonored, slain or carried away.

Now instead of Red Guards swaggering along these streets of empty or shuttered shops, thousands of citizens moved up and down in the sunshine, stirring the dust, which rose in clouds. Bands played. Banners welcoming us flaunted everywhere. Shops reopened.

Peasants who by some mysterious process of telegraphy had learned of the changed conditions drove their carts into town, piled high with produce, for the first time in weeks. They no longer had to fear that the Soviet soldiers would halt them and confiscate the best without payment. High though prices were, trade was booming. As a matter of fact there was at this time a vast difference in the matter of prices between Russia and Siberia in favor of the latter. At Cheliabinsk, for instance, bread could be bought for six to eight rubles a loaf, but in Moscow territory it was already up to three hundred and fifty rubles.

I think that we Czechs and Slovaks at Cheliabinsk all felt better now that the inevitable break with the Bolsheviks had come. It is true, we were in ignorance regarding the fate of our comrades behind in Russia, ahead in Siberia.

It is true, too, that thousands of miles of enemy territory lay north, south, east and west of us; and that undoubtedly we would not be left long without attack. Already, in fact, rumors were current that the Bolsheviks of neighboring towns were gathering for our destruction and were arming thousands of German and Magyar ex-prisoners of war to help exterminate us. Nevertheless, anxious though we were about our scattered echelons, serious though our own plight soon might become, it was something to have arms in our possession again and to know definitely after months of suspense just where we stood.

XII

DESPITE the rush and hurry of those ensuing days, during which none of us did much sleeping, when rumors of impending attack were rife, when we were trying to get in touch with other echelons, when our Delegates were organizing a Military Executive Committee to give all our forces that central control which now they lacked and when the conservative elements of the Russian population were coming out of their burrows and beginning to organize a new Government under our protection—during these days, I say, the thought of what lay ahead still managed to obtrude itself. Often in the few leisure moments which fell to us we would gather in groups, perhaps about a camp-fire on the tracks in the cool Spring nights—for we continued to live in our trains—and discuss the situation.

Complete possession of the Trans-Siberian Railway must first be gained. But even if we did succeed in seizing the railroad we would have to patrol adjacent territory on either side to prevent roving bands of Bolsheviks from approaching and cutting the line.

What a job that would be for our slender forces! We had only forty thousand men in all, and they were scattered from the other side of Penza in European Russia to Irkutsk near Lake Baikal, a distance of three thousand miles.

Unless we managed to put backbone into the better elements of the Siberian population, so that they organized a Government to replace the local Soviets as fast as we could expel the latter, we could not succeed. Our sole aim was to cut a way out of Siberia, but unless the railway was made safe for withdrawal of our far-flung units we could not escape. Instead, with the railroad cut in many places, ahead of and behind our echelons, each train would be isolated and in time inevitably be annihilated.

These were the things we thought, and when on top of that we considered the natural obstacles to be encountered I for one did not feel sanguine. Captain Ulrich, always optimistic since our easy success at Cheliabinsk, rallied me good-naturedly as we sat one night, smoking our pipes, on some railroad ties beside a fire near his *teplushka*.

"Why worry, Alexis?" he said. "These Red Guards have no belly for fighting. All they want to do is to rob somebody who can't fight back. They'll run fast enough every time we meet them."

"Nonsense," said I hotly: for a refusal to look facts in the face and prepare accordingly seems to me the worst of folly. "Perhaps some of the Red Guards—vagabonds and thieves of other days—fall into such a class. But remember these Russians have allies at hand who are of different caliber. Tens of thousands of Germans and Magyars are scattered through all this country. They hate us and will fight like fiends to oppose our retreat."

He grew thoughtful.

"That's true," he said. "Besides, the Kaiser will be anxious to have them return to bolster his armies. They can't return if we control the railroad. Therefore, I expect, he'll be ordering them to unite with the Bolsheviks against us."

I nodded.

"And even at long distance, when the Kaiser whistles these Germans will jump."

How prophetic were those chance remarks we were to learn later when evidence fell into our hands that the Kaiser not only had issued such orders, which the Bolsheviks disseminated among their old prisoners, but even had promised rewards of money and decorations to those who complied.

Because I had traveled up and down Siberia in the days before the Revolution when I was an organizer among our imprisoned compatriots, I was in a better position to realize the difficulties ahead of us than some others. What a land for forty thousand men to dream of conquering; for that is what we would have to do in order to ensure control of the railway and withdraw all our troops. From the Urals to the Pacific is a distance of four thousand miles; but it was not that alone which our troops must negotiate. Our rearmost legions were still west of Penza in European Russia. Thus we would have to fight our way across five thousand miles of territory, a distance almost twice as great as from New York to San Francisco.

This country, moreover, our opponents knew; while to most of us it was unfamiliar territory. What an advantage that would be! In the Volga marshes with their gloomy forests, in the defiles of the Urals, the Bolsheviks could lay many an ambuscade. Their chance to surprize us on the treeless tundra stretching hundreds of miles in western Siberia would be less.

But when we came to Irkutsk I shuddered. Forty miles beyond the city lay the great inland sea of Lake Baikal, ringed by high mountains which, around the southern extremity, the railroad pierced in a series of thirty-nine tunnels. If those tunnels were blocked by the Bolsheviks we would have no means of escape. We would be cut off in the heart of Siberia, with two thousand miles of territory yet intervening between us and Vladivostok.

Moreover, the weather was a factor to be reckoned with. I well remembered one day in May two years before when I had been at Omsk, a day in which we had suffered first a blizzard of snow, suddenly succeeded by hail, followed within a few hours by torrid temperatures which brought on a torrential downpour. Winter lingers long; the Summers are short and hot. Flies? I had seen them half as big as my thumb.

As for Winter; well, if we failed to get out of Siberia before Winter arrived, our misfortunes would reach their zenith. I could imagine no worse fate than to be forced to exist day after day, week after week, in a flimsy *teplushka* with the temperature fifty to sixty degrees below zero. Why, one March day in Irkutsk, that same year of 1916 during which I had been at Omsk and other points in this country, the temperature actually had touched fifty-nine degrees below zero.

Moreover, throughout all these thousands of miles which we must cross, except upon the treeless tundras of the west, were endless forests in which the Bolshevik bands could hide from us, emerging unexpectedly to pierce the railroad and then escaping again to shelter. For the plains, hills and mountains of Siberia are clothed with almost virgin forests of larch, fir and pine which the Trans-Siberian Railway skirts on the south. So enormous is the Siberian *taiga*, covering two million two hundred and fifty thousand square miles or a territory three-fourths the size of the entire United States, that even hunters and prospectors have not yet penetrated beyond its fringes.

If the Bolsheviks adopted guerrilla tactics and we pursued them into this *taiga*, abounding in giant bears, gray timber-wolves and the largest known species of tigers, we would stand little chance of capturing them and might on the other hand be ambushed ourselves and wiped out.

Yet this was the land we must conquer or die. Well, if we succeeded, people would call us heroes. But I for one felt anything but heroic as I faced the prospect.

XIII

IN THE next car a soldier was playing an accordion. The soft, throaty music, made more mellow by the intervening walls, seemed like the hum of bees on a Summer day. Through the open door where lay a pool of cool June sunshine came the shouts of soldiers playing football in a near-by field.

Truly, I thought as I sat back from posting my diary on top of a box for desk, things were not going badly. More than two weeks had elapsed since our capture of Cheliabinsk. And in that time we had had the best of news from our other echelons.

The rearmost echelons, six in number, constituting the last to leave the Ukrainian front in March, had concentrated a short distance west of Penza, and although one train had been wrecked with a loss of seventy killed they had captured the city. In a fierce bayonet charge one thousand five hundred had routed eight thousand Bolsheviks from entrenchments on the outskirts.

In this they had been materially aided by the unexpected arrival of an armored train from the direction of the city, which shelled the Bolsheviks from the rear. It was then discovered that a score of Czechs left behind by General Dieterichs to establish a supply station had obtained the train by strategy. Pretending to be pro-Bolshevik citizens, they had gone to the commander of the train, which was at the Penza station, and told him they had learned the track was mined by the Czecho-Slovaks. When ordered to take out his train, he and his crew deserted, whereupon these strategists seized it and fell upon the rear of the Red troops in the nick of time.

From Penza the rear guard had moved on toward the Volga River, gathering up other echelons *en route*. And in two weeks, after fighting hot engagements at Samara, Kygnerg, Busoloc, Simbirsk, Ufa and Bugulma, all our rear-guard forces, comprising about eleven thousand men, had gained complete possession of the railroad centers in the Volga region and were within striking-distance of the Urals.

At the same time Gajda had captured Ekaterinburg to the north of us in the Urals, and had swept like a cyclone down another line of railroad running from Ekaterinburg to Omsk. There the Reds were caught between two fires, Gajda on one side and a hard-hitting echelon to the east that had turned back, on the other.

Thus in two weeks we in the west had not only extricated ourselves from the clutch of the Bolsheviks but by seizure of rail and telegraph lines had cut off Moscow from communication with the interior of Siberia.

That was good, I thought, sitting there smoking my pipe and snatching a few idle moments before going up to the barracks, where we had established headquarters, to prepare some reports. They were to go into the morrow's issue of a daily paper we had established.

Some of those reports would read like fables. There was, for instance, the story of how a battalion of five hundred and eighty rifles had captured Kazan in eastern Russia, a city of two hundred thousand souls, and had held it an entire day before falling back.

There was the story of the battalion at Zlatoust, a town west of Cheliabinsk in the Urals. Captain Mueller, the commander, had not received our warning. Acting on Trotzky's order to butcher us, Red Guards surrounded his train in the dark hours of early morning. But they made the mistake of setting up their machine-guns too close, and in a leap or two Captain Mueller's men were upon them and had seized the guns and turned them on their former owners.

Then, discovering that the tracks had been torn up in front of and behind their train, our fellows, carrying their wounded and beating off all guerrilla attacks, had made their way eastward afoot in the hope of joining another echelon and uniting forces. Ignorant of the course of events, cut off from all communication with the outside world, strangers in hostile country, they had plodded along day after day through a densely forested stretch of the mountains, one of the few such in that region. Fortunately the Bashkir tribesmen were disposed to be friendly and supplied them with food and guides, and at length they emerged again on the railroad near the station of Myash to find a detachment of Czecho-Slovaks in control.

Yes, such stories, which had been coming in daily, made fine reading in our paper.

With a sigh I knocked out my pipe and got up and stretched in the sunshine flooding the open door, through which I could see off across the fields the little figures of some of our soldiers kicking the football. It was good to remember how successful we were becoming here in the west, I thought. But what of our echelons scattered over two thousand miles of territory in central Siberia, from Omsk to Irkutsk? Only rumors concerning events in that region had arrived so far from Gajda at Omsk.

How little we see into the future? At that very moment Lieutenant Haxa, who had flown across the Urals from Ufa in a captured observation plane, was circling above the big parade grounds at the barracks, preparing to land. But, all unconscious of this coming event and of the importance it was to assume for me, I left the train and walked up through the streets of Cheliabinsk, stepping out briskly because I feared I was late. And when I reached the parade ground and turned into the nearest building, which had been thoroughly cleaned for use as executive offices, so busy was I with my own thoughts that I did not even notice the plane.

While I ground away at a battered typewriter, putting some of our despatches from the west into shape for the printer, a man crossed the floor among desks at which various others were busy at different tasks and came to my corner.

"Are you Captain Broz?" he asked.

I looked up, seeing a tall, well-knit figure in aviation uniform, and a pleasing, bronzed face with an eager light in the blue eyes.

"Yes," said I, getting up.

"I'm Haxa—Lieutenant Haxa," he said. "I've just flown here from Ufa. We captured a plane. The Delegates wired me to come over for scout work. You remember."

I nodded. I had sent the telegram myself.

"I've just been talking to some of the Delegates," he continued. "They thought I was familiar with the country beyond; thought I'd been a prisoner up toward Omsk. But that's a mistake. Now they want me to go up there scouting beyond Omsk. I need a guide, somebody who knows the country, and some one said you'd be just the man. Will you come?"

Would I accept!

"If I can get the necessary permission," I said eagerly. "How soon will you be leaving?"

"It's pretty late in the day now," he said doubtfully. "Would it be wise to start at night? Besides, I ought to do a little tinkering and load up the spare gas-tank. How about early in the morning?"

"Fine. That would suit me better."

I knew there would be little difficulty obtaining the necessary permission to accompany him. Besides, in the mean time I could complete putting my reports in shape.

As I had anticipated, it was easy to obtain permission of the Military Executive Committee to accompany Lieutenant Haxa. This body of a dozen men, six of whom were elected by the private soldiers, was now in full control of our affairs. Anxious to hear about the progress of events in central Siberia, with which we had not yet been able to open telegraphic communication, they wanted Haxa to get away as soon as possible. Therefore if he wanted me as guide, let him have me.

Three or four members of the committee and a few guards at the stables formed our only audience as we rose from the parade ground at dawn. It promised to be a fine, clear day, but then one never could tell about this Siberian weather. However, the plane was powerful, and if a storm arose Haxa thought we could rise above it.

As the big field seemed to drop away below us and the city began to draw together as if a giant hand were contracting it, while the summits of the Urals came into view across the plain to the west, I experienced a sense of exhilaration which was not dulled by the thought that if anything went wrong before we got to Omsk we would be forced to descend in hostile country. At least, however, the descent probably could be made on the treeless tundra.

Besides, what could go wrong? Haxa had looked to the most minute stay and bolt. And the powerful two-seater, capable of making its hundred miles an hour, would cover the five hundred miles to Omsk without trouble.

We followed high above the line of the railway, and through glasses I could distinguish now and again little clumps of settlement beside it, mere stations for providing water and wood to the locomotives. Here and there was a train looking like a string of ants; doubtless one of our echelons.

We were flying high in order to be above conflicting air currents nearer the surface. There was no need in this territory to pay attention to what might be going on below, as from Cheliabinsk to Omsk the railway was in our hands.

It is flat, featureless country, this vast steppe of western Siberia, extending for a thousand miles from the Urals to the Yenesei River at Krasnoyarsk, where the foot-hills and plateaus of the central portion begin to appear. Farther northward are forests, but along the railroad it is treeless. Well did I know it, for I had traveled across by train. And yet there is a mystery about it defying description, with its occasional strings of camels glimpsed upon the horizon or its clumps of Tatar *yurtas*, or tents of skin.

We were glad at length to see in the distance a thin band of silver which proved to be the winding Irtish River, and upon its hither side the city of Omsk, a rude town of wooden buildings, unpaved streets and Tatar *yurtas* on the outskirts. Despite its population of one hundred and forty thousand it is only an overgrown frontier town plumped down in the middle of the treeless tundra, at the beginning and the end of nowhere.

Calm enough it looked as we circled above it in search of the drill-grounds where we planned to land. The Reds had been driven out, and we had no fear of attack naturally, although two weeks before rifles would have been popping viciously had a Czech plane flown overhead. It was not yet noon when we landed, but the good weather with which we had set out had been left behind. The sky was overcast, it was growing colder, a damp wind was beginning to strengthen out of the northwest.

"Looks bad for us if we have to go farther right away," said Haxa when we stood on the ground, while some Czechs approached curiously from the barracks.

"We'll soon find out," I replied. "They're expecting us, for I wired this morning. Now to learn our orders."

Posting several of the soldiers on guard, Haxa and I made our way to the administration offices whither we were directed.

A fair-haired young Slovak lieutenant looked up inquiringly from some papers on a littered desk in a cubby of an office inside the door. A disordered cot taking up one side of the room was evidence that he worked and slept in the same room, a condition which caused me to smile sympathetically.

Whatever his duties, whether communications, food or transport, he had little time to sleep, I knew. In those first weeks of our campaign to seize the railroad everybody was kept on the jump at all hours. Taking over control of the railroads meant an endless amount of detail work in the matter of maintaining traffic, keeping supply-trains moving, herding refugees from the country districts who fled to the cities before the marauding bands of Bolsheviks and their German and Magyar allies. And not many were fitted to cope with the task.

When he saw Haxa's uniform the other jumped up and with quick, nervous movements grasped and shook our hands.

"Lieutenant Haxa and Captain Broz?" he said. "I was told by the telegrapher to expect you. That must have been your plane I heard."

"Yes."

Haxa nodded toward the little window. "Left it on the parade ground."

"Now what's orders?"

Our host pressed us to sit down on the couch while a soldier, answering his call, hurried away for sandwiches and coffee, which he returned with shortly. The coffee in a steaming can tasted delicious, and I found that after the flight I was ravenous. While we ate we talked.

Gajda was somewhere to the east. After the fall of Omsk June 7 he had pushed on eastward. Tomsk, the intellectual and commercial capital of western Siberia, some five hundred miles distant on the river Ob, had just fallen to him the day before. We had not heard of it yet when leaving Cheliabinsk.

As at Omsk, the Bolsheviks had been caught between two fires, between the forces under Gajda coming up from the west and an echelon east of the city. Fleeing by steamer on the Ob, the Tomsk Soviet had carried away a big treasure looted from the inhabitants.

This was the news; news indeed to us. With Tomsk in our possession our fortunes were looking up. But, continued the young Slovak lieutenant, the Bolsheviks had cut the wires beyond Tomsk to the eastward. Gajda therefore was in ignorance of the progress of events in that territory. And although our informant was without authority to order us forward, he believed it would be a good thing if we flew to Tomsk and put ourselves at Gajda's service.

Haxa gulped down the last of his coffee and looked at his watch. Then he got to his feet.

"Just noon," he said. "We can do it, I guess, if we have to. But we ought to load up more gas, and that'll take time. Besides, when we came in it looked as if we were in for a storm. Let's have a look at the weather."

He went to the window, peered out, then shook his head.

"Blowing hard out of the northwest," he said anxiously. "If you have a hangar we'll stay here and put up the plane till it blows itself out."

"There is no hangar."

"We might anchor her down, of course," said Haxa thoughtfully.

He turned to me.

"Care to try flying? We can get above the storm. And we still have plenty of daylight because these June days it's light until nine or ten o'clock this far north."

I was game if he was.

"How about gas? Going to take on any more?"

"Oh, we have some drums of gasoline right here on the drill-grounds," volunteered our host. "The Bolsheviks had a number of automobiles, including a couple of armored cars which we captured. I can have some rolled out to you in no time."

"All right," said Haxa. "It's a go. But let's be quick about it. I don't want that wind to get much stronger before taking off."

The plane already was beginning to tremble and rock a little from the force of the wind, which was coming in uncertain, fitful gusts, as with gasoline tanks replenished we strapped ourselves in and prepared to depart. Haxa waited until a lull came, then taxied and with engine roaring took off. Soon we were headed once more eastward and rising steadily. The wisdom of this course presently became apparent, for less than half an hour after we left Omsk we were flying above a heavy mass of wind-driven clouds.

Although the ground was hidden and we had lost the guidance of the railroad tracks, it was an easy enough matter to follow a course by compass. Hour after hour passed, and still the cloud bank below us was practically unbroken. Now and then there would be a rift, through which the glasses gave a glimpse of sodden country below. The tundra was getting a hard soaking.

Flying in brilliant sunshine above that tumbled mass of clouds, alone in the immensity of space, gave me an eerie feeling. But at length after what seemed an eternity the clouds below thinned out into flying shreds and streamers and finally disappeared altogether, going off to the southwestward. It was a strange sight to gaze down from that lofty altitude and see the rays of the sun take possession of the rain-soaked plains and forests as the clouds retreated, like a great golden broom sweeping darkness away.

Nowhere was the railroad which bears due eastward from Omsk to Tomsk to be seen. We dropped down for a closer inspection of the country, and saw that we had left the treeless tundra behind and were flying above a rolling, forested country. Perhaps we had borne too far northward. Certainly the distance we had come would put us in the vicinity of Tomsk.

Then away on the horizon, broadening as we approached, showed a band of water.

"The river Ob," said I confidently. "Tomsk must lie to the south. We probably have hit the Ob at the great westward bend above the city."

XIV

OWHEN finally we did reach Tomsk—certainly from the air a more cosmopolitan city than Omsk, and as I knew from experience such in reality, with good stores, theaters, paved streets—the late daylight was at last beginning to wane. And on climbing from my seat, after unbuckling the straps which had held me in, I was so stiff that the soldiers who ran up to greet us on the parade ground steadied me for a moment until the blood once more began circulating through my legs.

Haxa, however, despite his long hours at the stick and the thousand-mile journey, broken only by a short interval of rest at Omsk, seemed none the worse. He stepped out briskly after the soldiers who undertook to trundle his plane into a hangar, which we could see yawning emptily at one side of the great parade ground, leaving me to make my way in the hobbling fashion of a man whose legs have, so to speak, gone to sleep, toward the administration offices which one of the men pointed out.

A familiar figure emerged from the doorway as I approached, and even though the fading light made identification difficult I felt my heart give a leap. There was nothing the matter with my legs now as I covered the remaining yards, shouting—

"Kober, Kober, is it really you?"

And it really was. We slapped each other on the chest, shook hands over and over again and all but embraced, then plopped ourselves down on the broad steps where soldiers passing in and out had to turn aside to avoid us. But we were unmindful of the continuous coming and going, and the others on their part, seeing our joy at meeting each other, did not disturb us.

We sat there for some minutes while Kober said that when he happened to overhear it stated a message had been received from Omsk to the effect that I was approaching by airplane with Lieutenant Haxa he had made it his business to wait for my arrival. How did he happen to be in Tomsk? He explained: After I had left him at Kharkov, his echelon had moved over a northerly railway line toward Ekaterinburg. He had been near that city when the Cheliabinsk incident had precipitated the inevitable conflict with the Bolsheviks, and had formed part of the force with which Gajda had swept down toward Omsk. In fact he had been through all the fighting under that firebrand up to the present time.

"And, Alexis," he added, his face lighting with enthusiasm, "Captain Gajda is a real man to fight under. Have you heard of the simple plan he evolved for checkmating the Bolsheviks? It is a wonderful scheme; works like a charm. We have used it time and again against greater numbers, and it never fails."

I shook my head. No, I hadn't heard. Thereupon Kober launched into a glowing recital. Gajda's scheme, as he described it, was simplicity itself, but like many simple things marvelously efficient. Whenever in his advance along the railroad with his trainload of fighters he encountered a superior force of Bolsheviks he would retreat at top speed. The Bolsheviks, filled with wholesome respect for our fighting qualities, would follow, but with caution.

Thus after he had retreated, say, a score of miles, Gajda would be separated from them by perhaps half that distance. Then, abandoning his train, he would detour his troops out of sight of the railroad back the way he had come. Striking the railroad in the rear of the Bolsheviks, he would cut the line, leaving them isolated.

Sometimes then if aware that other Czecho-Slovak troops were ahead he would march to join them. At other times, having cut the railroad where he left it in front of the Bolsheviks and again having cut it behind them, he would attack. Bewildered, their retreat along the railroad cut off, attacked thus unexpectedly from the forest, the Bolsheviks would abandon their train and flee afoot in panic.

Kober's eyes shone.

"A great captain."

At this moment Lieutenant Haxa dropped a hand on my shoulder.

"So here you are. I've reported already. Gajda is up toward Marinsk, wherever that is. We fly to join him tomorrow."

Introductions were made, and Kober undertook to see us housed for the night. He mourned:

"Laid up with a bullet through my shoulder, or I'd be with Gajda. You fellows will be in luck. Wherever he goes, the fur flies."

I had to smile. Kober would enjoy a diet of bullets, sabers and bayonets.

Dinner in the officers' mess was over, but Kober found us something to eat while a score of others, still sitting about the table, plied us with eager questions regarding the fate of our legions in the west. They knew in a general way of our successes, but they had been too busy with their own affairs to receive any details.

All present had been incapacitated with slight wounds in the recent fighting and like Kober were filled with regret at having been unable to push forward after the capture of Tomsk with Gajda. Like Kober, too, they not only praised Gajda but praised him extravagantly. He seemed to have the Napoleonic quality of arousing adoration.

"How many men has he got?" asked Haxa curiously.

Kober explained.

"Gajda holds that lightning-swift movement is the prime necessity if the railroad is to be cleared before the Bolsheviks of the cities can unite and mass their Red Guards and German and Magyar ex-prisoners against us. So he takes no more men than can move at top speed. Sometimes in some of his battles he has not had more than five hundred rifles. All told, so far, not more than three thousand five hundred men have borne the brunt of the fighting, the rest coming along behind."

He looked around for confirmation, and several heads nodded.

"If you're wounded only a little, no matter how slightly," mourned a slim, dark lieutenant, "you drop behind to help the moppers-up consolidate our grip on the railroad. Gajda wants only Mercuries with him. And by the time you recover, your chance of rejoining him is no more. Probably," he added, "by the time my arm heals up he'll be at Vladivostok."

A general laugh followed, interrupted by an older lieutenant, a man in his thirties, who said:

"Not Vladivostok. Gajda will find his hands full when he gets to Lake Baikal. That is, if the Reds take it into their heads to block the tunnels—blow them up maybe."

To that I gave assent.

"Thirty-nine of them. I've been through there."

Haxa and I took little part in the discussion, which presently turned to the political aspect of our campaign and the question of what help we could hope to look for from the anti-Bolshevik elements of the population. We were beginning to feel the need of rest, and, excusing ourselves, were piloted by Kober to some cots in an upstairs room.

"Not many of us here now," said Kober, "so you'll have reasonable privacy. There are only two others besides myself to occupy these twenty beds."

With that he left us, promising to be on hand in the morning to see us off. And Haxa and I, throwing off our coats, loosening our collars and kicking off our shoes, but without the formality of undressing, threw ourselves down. And I for my part was soon fast asleep and did not waken until Haxa shook my shoulder and I turned over to find gray dawn at the windows.

XV

FROM Tomsk to Marinsk, which is also on the river Ob, is only a short distance of fifty or sixty miles, and for this fact we were grateful as hardly had we taken off than it began to rain. The rain soon turned to a downpour, a waterfall, and if it had not been for the coats with which Kober saw we were provided before departure we would have been drenched to the skin.

Where to land was a question which worried us. Marinsk, a small town on the western bank of the Ob, had, of course, no landing-field. Neither was it provided with big drill-grounds such as we had landed upon at Omsk and Tomsk.

My recollection of it was hazy. I had passed through it on the railroad several times but had never alighted, and all I recalled was a straggling Siberian town of low frame houses, many indeed frontier log structures of one and two rooms such as formerly dotted the American West. But I seemed to recall a level prairie immediately to the west, and as we flew low in the rain there it was, sure enough.

"The ground will be soft," said Haxa anxiously. "But I don't see any irrigation ditches, and that is something. We'll chance it."

However, the landing was effected without damage to ourselves or, of more importance, to the plane. A mile or so ahead we had discerned from the air the little cluster of houses marking the town, but from the ground because of a mist beaten up by the heavy rain we no longer could see Marinsk. However, on our right across the fields ran the steel ribbon of the Trans-Siberian, and not far away was a long train of *teplushkas*, unmistakably one of our echelons.

Standing there in the fields with no sign of life showing, the train bore a lonesome, deserted appearance. And as we started making our way toward it we surmised that the soldiers had alighted and gone up ahead to fight. Now and then we heard in the distance a low, rumbling note which might have been cannon.

As we neared the train the figure of a young soldier with a bloody bandage about his head and his left arm in a sling rose up from the step of the rearmost *teplushka* to greet us. He stared, unbelieving.

"I thought you were Bolsheviks," he muttered.

After he had got over his first surprise he explained the situation as he understood it. Gajda had come up several days before but had found his hands tied and himself unable to make a move until the expiration of a ten-day truce arranged with the Bolsheviks by members of the American Railway Commission who were at Krasnoyarsk, the Bolshevik center on the Yenisei River, some two hundred miles farther eastward.

The previous day this truce had expired without accomplishing anything except to give the Bolsheviks an opportunity to concentrate fresh forces. Then with panther-like quickness Gajda had flung himself on the Bolsheviks of Marinsk and had driven them across the bridge over the Ob to the eastern bank. In this fighting our informant was wounded and with others had made his way back to the train.

"The sawbones is at work up front," he said with a jerk of a thumb. "About fifty of us managed to crawl back. We lost maybe a dozen killed."

"How many men with Captain Gajda?"

"Thirteen hundred," said the soldier.

In preparation for Gajda's advance, he continued, the Bolsheviks had utilized the truce to throw up a line of trenches at the eastern end of the bridge. And on a ridge of hills on the eastern bank, from which every move of the Czecho-Slovaks on the opposite shore could be seen, they had mounted cannon commanding the approaches.

At this moment we were interrupted by

a hail from farther along the tracks and looked up to see a slim figure in sergeant's uniform hobbling alongside the train, supported by a heavy stick. His left foot was enormously swathed in bandages and was held from touching the ground by a piece of rope made into a sling and lashed around his waist. He hopped rather than hobbled; and his head was bent to watch the going, so that we could not see his face. But Haxa stared hard, then with an exclamation ran to meet the newcomer.

The young soldier and I looked on curiously as the two met and greeted each other effusively. Then Haxa, supporting the other, brought him up to me. He was only a stripling with a boy's face from which snapping blue eyes glittered beneath a mop of light hair.

"Jan Gemelka, Captain Broz," said Haxa. "He used to be a sub-lieutenant in my old Austrian regiment."

Sergeant Gemelka had seen us alight in the fields and had hastened from the forward part of the train to talk with us. He made a wry face as he explained he had been kept out of the recent fighting by blood-poison due to stepping on a rusted nail, and had not even been wounded. And while the four of us stood there the democratic spirit of our army was plainly evidenced; for captain, lieutenant, sergeant, private, all talked and interrupted each other indiscriminately.

Instead of throwing away his men in a desperate attempt to force the Marinsk bridge in face of the Bolshevik trenches and the cannon mounted on the heights beyond, we learned Gajda had undertaken to outflank the Bolsheviks. Waiting until nightfall, he had marched his thirteen hundred men with a battery of field-pieces to a point twenty-five miles up the river, with the intention of swinging around behind the Bolsheviks and cutting their lines of communication with Krasnoyarsk by both rail and telegraph.

"The troops marched away in the pouring rain," said Sergeant Gemelka. "But what happened, what is happening now, of course I don't know. We haven't had any word from the front."

He turned and stared away eastward through the ground mist, arm extended. So engrossed had we been that I noticed for the first time that the downpour had lessened to the merest drizzle.

"But we have heard the cannon," he said. "Miles away. Listen. You can hear, too. It has been going on for the last hour."

And again as we all ceased talking, came that distant mutter as of thunder faraway in the hills.

Haxa looked speculatively up at the sky. Even the drizzle had come to an end. The day was growing momently brighter and in another minute the sun burned through the mist, falling with magical effect upon the fields spangled with wild flowers.

"Did you notice how hard that was where we landed?" asked Haxa, turning to me. "Probably a sandy clay soil that drains quickly. Besides, these fields have never been ploughed. I really believe we can manage to take off without much trouble."

I laughed.

"Come on. I'd like to fly over there, too."

"If we only carried bombs!" mourned Haxa. "Well, let's try it."

We said farewells to Sergeant Gemelka and the wounded private, Haxa promising to get in touch with the former again shortly, and then strode away toward the plane. The sunshine had uplifted our spirits tremendously, and as we strode along, doffing our raincoats, the world seemed clean and fair. It was hard to believe that not many miles from these wild flowers, scattered in such riotous profusion, men were at grips with death.

Taking-off was managed quite easily; and, mounting into the sunshine, we flew away toward the Ob while the echelon dwindled behind and the figures of Sergeant Gemelka and the bandaged soldier, waving handkerchiefs, blurred and vanished.

We took a course toward the north, where Gajda had presumably made his crossing of the Ob which put Marinsk, with its bridge guarded at one end by Bolsheviks and at the other by our own troops, far on our right. Soon we were flying over hilly, forested country culminating in steep bluffs along both banks of the river. I kept searching the river through my glasses for sight of boats which would indicate the crossing, and when presently I descried three small boats, the only ones to be seen, tied up on the eastern bank with a small group of men near by, we turned away from the Ob to the eastward.

Suddenly the motor ceased its steady, droning roar and began to misfire. Haxa worked desperately with what I presumed was a primer. I don't know much about airplanes. For a moment or two matters seemed to right themselves.

But then the sound of the motor died completely, to resume again in the limping fashion of a motor car not hitting on all cylinders, only to be switched off by Haxa. His face was pale but determined as he put his plane into a long gliding descent toward a sunburned, grassy hillside bare of trees away on our right.

At the end he did what he afterward described as pancaking, hovering above the ground and dropping instead of gliding down, a difficult maneuver I imagine at any time, but especially without the engine. We were jarred but unhurt, and the plane rolled slowly along the gentle slope until Haxa caused it to swerve to one side and thus stopped the descent and brought it to a halt.

He wiped his pale face with a handkerchief as he stood on the ground staring in puzzled fashion at the plane.

"Lucky we didn't have to land in treetops," he said. "Something fouled up. Well, here we are, out of it all."

XVI

OUT of it all we were indeed. Knowing nothing about airplanes, I could be of no assistance to Haxa, who took off his coat and went to work. We were in a shallow depression among the hills. Not a soul other than ourselves was in sight. It was pleasantly warm in the sun; wild flowers nodded all about; from distant patches of woodland clothing the slopes came a bird-call now and then, and so still was the air that even the hum of great bees tippling amidst the clover red and white about us could be heard. Even the sound of the cannon, which at Marinsk we had heard muttering in the distance, could no longer be heard, although we had approached a good deal closer.

I looked at my watch. It was noon.

"Gajda has beaten them back," I said confidently. "Otherwise we'd hear the guns."

Haxa nodded.

"Wish you knew something about mechanics," he said. "I need help."

Stretched on my back in the grass, I was idly gazing from beneath the brim of my cap toward the eastern rim of the cup-shaped depression in which we found ourselves when I saw two tiny figures top the bare rise and stand there. They had seen us and were halting in amazement. With an exclamation I gained my feet and seized Haxa's arm. He raised up from his stooping position over the engine and gazed whither I pointed.

A third figure joined the first two. Were they friends or enemy? At that distance, we could not tell. But something in their drooping attitude gave me a clew.

"Czech wounded, making their way to the rear."

Haxa nodded.

"You have your revolver. Why not go and see?"

At that I advanced up the slope, hands upraised in token of peace, for I feared they might fire upon me, mistaking me for a Bolshevik. They held their ground, and with each step bringing me nearer I was more certain my surmise as to their identity was correct. Presently I could discern their worn uniforms, the bloody bandage about one man's head, the rude sling supporting another's arm, the stubble of beard on all and the white face of the third, who leaned on his rifle with one hand and clutched at his side with the other.

Then I called to them in our own tongue that I was a Czech, and their faces lighted. Answering that they, too, were Czechs, they began to stumble down the slope.

Beside the airplane they sank wearily to the ground while we—Haxa deserting his work—plied them with questions regarding the battle. They did not have much information. Men in the thick of it seldom do. They know what is going on around them, and that is all.

Leaving Marinsk at night in the pouring rain, they had stumbled after their guides through pitch-black darkness for twenty-five miles. Going astray several times in the storm and darkness, they did not reach the river until six o'clock in the morning, although it had been expected they would be at the ford at 4:30.

On arrival only three small boats instead of the dozen promised by anti-Bolshevik sympathizers were found. None was large enough for transport of the field-pieces, which accordingly had to be sent back.

The Ob was only one hundred feet wide here, but the current was swift between high banks and the water ice-cold. Some of the soldiers attempted to swim across but became so numbed by the icy water that they were rescued with difficulty. At length after three hours' toil at the oars, on every trip the boats loaded to the gunwales, the crossing was effected.

Undaunted at this miscarriage of his plans, Gajda had advanced with the first company to gain the opposite shore, leaving orders for the others to follow as fast as they arrived. With him he had a number of machine guns. How many, our informants did not know.

As for them, they had been in a detachment following behind Gajda and had been shot down from some woods without ever seeing their assailants. Since then they had been making their way to the rear.

This was all they knew of the battle, except that evidently Gajda had continued to push ahead, for the sounds of fighting had receded gradually and, as we were aware, no longer could be heard.

Grimacing with pain, all three finally got to their feet again and resumed their slow progress to the river base where a guard had been left over the boats. They hoped to be taken up-river to Marinsk by boat. The Ob, by the way, like the Yenisei—"Father Yenisei"—takes its rise in the Altai Mountains on the Mongolian border and flows northward to empty into the Arctic Ocean. Thus, although Marinsk was to the southward, to reach it by river one would have to pull against the current.

Their receding forms finally disappeared from view and once more we were left alone in the peaceful scene into which those bloody figures, so strangely foreign to it, had intruded. No others came with talk of battle, although I kept continually raising my eyes to the eastern horizon.

And, unable to aid Haxa, I finally dropped off to sleep in the mild sunshine. How long I had slept I didn't know, but when I rolled over and sat up at Haxa's call, it was to see him standing grease-covered beside the plane, wearing the most comical expression I ever expect to see on a man's face.

"The joke's on me," he said. "I all but took her apart, looking for something serious, only to discover just now that the feed was choked. I've drained it, and everything's lovely."

The sun was low as I got to my feet, and a look at my watch disclosed that it was five o'clock in the afternoon. Haxa, angry with himself for his failure earlier to discover the cause of the airplane's trouble, was all for going on. He had plenty of gas, as his tanks again had been filled up before departure that morning from Tomsk. Before awaking me he had inspected the ground and had decided how to take off.

"This country is getting hillier," he said before starting. "Lots of forest, too. But there'll be no more forced landings, because I've just about overhauled everything. We'll try and find Gajda and have a look at how he's making out. And then if we don't see a good place to land we'll fly back to that field at Marinsk. Only thing is, I'm just about starved."

With an exclamation I pulled from a side pocket of my raincoat a package pressed on me by Kober before we left Tomsk. It contained bread and cheese, and this with water from our canteens provided a real feast. We ate before starting, and not until the last crumb was consumed did we take to the air again.

The glasses revealed rolling, forested hills with here and there sunburned bare spots such as that where we had landed but nowhere any sign of man. Haxa therefore headed up the river toward Marinsk, planning to turn eastward at that point and follow the railroad.

To my surprize the low hills opposite the town which had been held by the Bolsheviks appeared deserted, and this we made sure of when Haxa swooped low above them. The field-pieces were gone.

And the passage of several figures across the bridge also surprized us. Could it be the Bolsheviks had been driven from their entrenchments?

With this to puzzle over, we turned eastward along the railroad and some miles farther on saw below us the still smoking ruins of a burned train blocking the tracks. Just beyond this train the tracks were torn up, and on the other side of the gap stood one of our unmistakable trains of *teplushkas* and near it a train of four cars sheathed in armor plate, one of which mounted a long rifle on a pivot, while from the others poked the wicked muzzles of rapid-firers.

Flying low above the scene, we could make out scores of little figures coming and going about the two trains and others busied repairing the break in the railroad. Undoubtedly they were our troops. And Haxa, after flying over the scene, turned about and returned. I knew he was looking for a possible landing-place; but I could not see one, and apparently neither could he.

Then he headed for Marinsk, and in a short time we were back once more in the field near the train at the western edge of the town.

"What did you make of it?" he asked after we alighted.

I knew to what he referred.

"Gajda joined forces with a Czech echelon behind the Bolsheviks and cut the railroad. Evidently the Bolsheviks were routed. Perhaps they set fire to their own train. I don't know the meaning of that armored train, but probably we captured it. Anyway the railway seems to be in our possession."

"That's what I make of it, too," he said. "Well, we haven't been of much help so far, but we've managed to see a lot. Let's try and find Gemelka and see what he knows. Also I could eat horse-meat."

XVII

OUR interpretation of what we had observed from the air proved generally correct, as was disclosed by news reaching Marinsk in detail later that evening.

Gajda, in brief, had managed to outflank the Bolsheviks on the heights opposite Marinsk and by great good fortune on getting in their rear had found them so busily engaged in trying to surround and capture a strange force of mixed Czecho-Slovaks and Rumanians which had abandoned its echelon because of the danger from the Bolshevik armored train and had entrenched on a hilltop beside the railway, that he was able to fall upon them before they were aware of his presence. Apparently the small parties encountered in the hills after the crossing of the Ob had been roving bands which had disappeared without giving warning to the main body of Bolsheviks of Gajda's approach.

When Gajda fell upon the rear of the Bolsheviks, the Czecho-Slovaks and Rumanians abandoned their positions of shelter and came flying down the hillside, and the Bolsheviks, caught between two fires, turned and fled. Our troops pursued them only a short distance and then returned to the railroad, because the enemy scattered through the forests and further pursuit would have been both futile and unsafe.

It was then learned that the echelon to whose rescue Gajda had come in such timely fashion was under the command of Lieutenant Kadlec and represented the westernmost of the echelons in central Siberia with which up to then we in the west had been unable to communicate. It had been fighting westward from the vicinity of Krasnoyarsk when the truce brought about by the American Railway Commission at the latter point had halted its efforts to establish contact with our trains west of Marinsk. That morning, the truce having expired as already noted, the Bolsheviks had brought up an armored train from the direction of Krasnoyarsk, and Lieutenant Kadlec had fled ahead of it until reaching the gap in the railroad which the Bolsheviks themselves had created in order to prevent his approach to Marinsk.

Then Kadlec's men, eight hundred in number, had abandoned their train and taken to the hilltop, where they were being hotly pressed by the Bolsheviks from Marinsk when Gajda opportunely came to the rescue. Thus it was the sound of the armored train's cannon firing at Kadlec which we had heard across the river that morning and had mistaken for a Bolshevik attack on Gajda.

With this union of our western and central units at Marinsk, the Trans-Siberian Railway from Ufa in Russia to the vicinity of Krasnoyarsk on the Yenisei was now in a way of speaking under our control. But actual control was still far from effected. The railway was in a sad state, torn up in numerous places, bridges broken, telegraph lines down.

But we had ample cause for rejoicing nevertheless because in one short month from the Cheliabinsk incident and the sending of Trotzky's infamous order calling upon the Siberian Bolsheviks to destroy us, all our echelons from the Russian rear guard clear up to Krasnoyarsk, a distance as far as from New York City to Salt Lake City, estimated roughly, had managed to extricate themselves and to put the Bolsheviks to rout.

This territory, however, was the sparsely settled plains of western Siberia, in which were no large Bolshevik centers. We had had now to contend with the Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk Bolsheviks. And of the fate of our echelons between those two cities, nothing was known.

However, after joining forces with Kadlec, Gajda with two thousand men and an armored train moved up confidently to the attack of Krasnoyarsk.

By all accounts the Krasnoyarsk Soviet was one of the most particularly vicious. Kadlec's mixed force of Czechs, Slovaks and Rumanians, whose echelon had been held up in the vicinity a full month before the outbreak of hostilities, had had many opportunities to observe the oppressions of the Bolsheviks. Merchants, doctors, professional men of one sort or another, officers of the old Army, all had been so persecuted that hundreds had fled into the wild mountain country southward toward the Altai range to seek refuge among the Altai Cossacks, while still others had hidden in the forests to the north. For weeks—no, months—roving bands of Red Guards had been scouring the country, said our informants, and many were the tales of wholesale slaughter and unbelievable cruelty practised in the wilderness.

In the pay of the Soviet were enlisted not only Siberians but thousands of Germans and Magyar ex-prisoners of war, as well as a riffraff of Mongols, Chinese, Buriats and Tatars.

These tales filled us all with the utmost indignation and fury, and when Haxa and I were sent for by Gajda and asked to fly over Krasnoyarsk and the country beyond on a scouting expedition, we were more than willing to comply.

Our interview was held in the curtained-off end of a *teplushka*, furnished with only a crude table littered with maps and a few folding camp-chairs obtained from somewhere. Gajda was alone when we entered. As he arose to greet us I saw his round, firm face light warmly and experienced a natural sense of pleasure that, despite all which had come between, he recalled instantly our meeting at Cheliabinsk.

The conference was brief. He desired us first to see what preparations for defense of Krasnoyarsk had been made by the Bolsheviks; and second, to scout along the railroad beyond and try to open communication with any of our echelons which might be in the vicinity.

"As you doubtless know," he said, "we have been unable to find out what has happened to our men between Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk. The Bolsheviks hold the telegraph, and until your arrival there has been no way of getting in touch with our comrades. But it is possible that whatever forces are in that region have successfully resisted Bolshevik attack. If we can arrange matters so that an attack on Krasnoyarsk is delivered from the east at the same time that we strike from the west, nothing better could be asked. Your main object therefore will be to try to get in touch with any forces to the eastward and to act as couriers between us."

After some further general conversation we took our departure. And with gas-tanks once more filled and a plentiful supply of oil, both obtained from stores confiscated by Gajda at Marinsk, we set out.

We were soon above Krasnoyarsk, and as it was a clear, bright day the whole scene lay open to our view below. We could see the broad flood of the Yenisei, still swollen from the Spring rains and the melting snows of the Altai range, flowing northward between high bluffs.

In the middle of a considerable plain on the western bank stood Krasnoyarsk, formerly a busy city of fifty thousand souls but now a city of mourning. Through glasses it was plain to see streets and houses, the wharves along the river front at which half a dozen steamers and numerous smaller craft were tied up, barracks on the northwestern outskirts and a considerable number of cars and locomotives in the railroad yards. Spanning the river was a modern steel bridge. And at its eastern end lay a smaller settlement of houses.

There were no signs of entrenchments, but to the west of Krasnoyarsk the railroad tracks had been torn up at one place in a gap perhaps half a mile wide.

With this we had to be satisfied, as Haxa considered it unwise to fly lower lest the Bolsheviks by some chance possess an anti-aircraft gun or two and be able to bring us down. In fact as we passed above the barracks, embowered among trees, we flew lower than was wise, as was evidenced by a thin whining sound among the wings. No damage was done, but it was apparent that we were within rifle-range. And as a stray shot might pierce the gas-tanks without our being the wiser, Haxa at once sought loftier altitudes.

Leaving the city behind, we were presently flying above a rolling country of woods and hills, keeping the railroad always in sight. But there were no trains anywhere and after flying fifty miles and passing a number of tiny stations Haxa swung about and started to return.

We had covered half the distance back to the Yenisei when a haze of smoke to the right caught my eye. Haxa at my request headed his plane in that direction, and through the glasses presently came into view a considerable camp in a glade of thinned-out trees alongside of a broad stream. Over the hills beyond grazed a big herd of horses. And in the grove we could glimpse numerous small fires about which there was a coming and going of men.

Altogether it was a big camp of perhaps five or six hundred men. But whether friends or enemies we could not tell. To fly low enough to make certain and risk again the chance of a shot which would bring us down among the treetops of this wilderness was out of the question.

But as we started to fly away it occurred to me that if we could find some open space upon which to make a landing I might alight and go back to spy on the camp. Haxa was dubious, and his doubt apparently was justified, for at first no open spaces at all possible for landing could be seen. But I was determined, so Haxa described a circle about the camp as pivot, while I anxiously scanned the country below.

At length what seemed to be an ideal spot for our purpose appeared. It was a level plateau ringed by low hills, a mile or more in length by a half-mile in width, carpeted with wild flowers and bare of trees. Although undoubtedly we had been observed from the camp, it seemed safe enough to come down as this spot was more than five miles away.

Accordingly Haxa shut off his engine and glided down to a safe landing. Although we had done more than three hundred miles we had started early in the morning, and it was not yet noon. The walk to the vicinity of the camp and return would consume two or three hours, but we would still have plenty of daylight left for the return to Marinsk. Leaving Haxa with his plane and taking compass and revolver, I set out.

An hour and a half later I lay amid a screen of bushes on a little rise on the opposite bank of the stream, which I had taken the precaution to cross, and ahead through the trees I could see a portion of the camp. The forest of larch, fir and pine, with little underbrush, had offered no obstruction to my approach.

For a while after crawling into position I lay still and quiet, straining my ears to learn whether my stealthy approach had been discovered and any one were stalking me. But no sound came except occasional bird notes, the scuttle of some small animal through the woods behind, the faint tinkling of water over stones ahead.

From my retreat two or three rude huts of logs and bark could be seen while others were suggested amongst the trees on the left. Evidently I had come down at the upper end of the camp. The horses as well as the main portion of the camp, which earlier I had noted from the air, both were beyond sight.

I made up my mind to crawl back, make my way down-stream and take up a more advantageous position opposite the main portion of the camp, where I could see its occupants, none of whom was visible, and perhaps overhear them converse and thus ascertain their identity.

As I started to turn about to withdraw, there was a snapping of twigs behind me; and the next moment, not twenty feet away, the bushes parted and a man uprose covering me with a rifle. My heart was in my mouth. It was too late to reach for my revolver. And he was a bearded Russian; in rags and tatters, it is true, but still undoubtedly a Bolshevik.

We stared at each other, I on hands and knees, and I thought my end had come. Then to my surprize he began to laugh. He laughed so hard that the rifle wavered in his hands, and I was just about to spring for him when he sobered and spoke.

"You are a Czech," he said. "Not so? And I thought you one of those——rascals."

Still on hands and knees, I gazed at him bewildered.

"Come, come, get up," he said, chuckling. "I don't know how in the world you happen to be here, but you are amongst friends."

At that I got to my feet, still too

bewildered to speak, but the light beginning to dawn.

"And you," I finally managed to say, "are not Bolsheviks?"

"God be praised, no," he said, lowering his rifle. "We are former Russian Army officers who have come together here under Usakov."

My expression was one of relief, but still must have failed to convey understanding, for he added with a trace of impatience—

"Haven't you heard of Lieutenant Colonel Usakov?"

I admitted I had not, and he shrugged.

"You'll find out soon enough," he said. "If you are a Czech, well and good. But if not, I advise you to say your prayers. Start walking now, and remember I shall be behind you."

In an apologetic tone he added:

"I don't mean to be hard on you if you really are a friend, although I can not understand how you came here. There are no Czech trains in the vicinity."

Obedient to directions, I started to descend the slope, calling back over my shoulder—

"Didn't you see our airplane?"

"Oh," cried my captor in relieved surprize. "We thought it was a Bolshevik plane from Krasnoyarsk."

Picking a way across some stepping-stones in the stream, we moved along the other shore, passing two or three rude huts and then, rounding a bend in the shore, came in sight of the main camp. It was larger than I had thought on seeing it from the air. The huts—of logs, bark or merely great boughs wrenched from trees with withered leaves still upon them—stretched away so far amongst the trees that I revised my estimates. Not five or six hundred men, but all of a thousand, must lie here.

Such indeed proved to be the case. And many curious glances were thrown at me from lounging groups as my captor led to a hut open on one side, within which sat a man cross-legged on the ground, a worn portfolio on his knees on which he was writing. He looked up inquiringly, displaying a face of arresting intelligence, smooth-shaven, lean, with piercing eyes under heavy brows, a man of thirty-five or thirty-eight I should judge. With a salute my captor said:

"I found this man spying, colonel. He says he is a Czech."

Usakov, for such I took him to be, put aside his portfolio and rose to his feet, a man as tall as I.

"Is that the truth?" he asked with a touch of sternness.

"It is," said I, confidently. "Will you permit me to explain?"

He nodded, and thereupon I launched into a brief description of the reasons which had brought Haxa flying overhead and of how, after spotting the camp, I had landed and approached to learn its nature. As I went on Colonel Usakov's stern look relaxed, and when I had concluded he gripped my hand warmly.

"This is fine news you bring; fine news, sir," he said. "Your Captain Gajda must be a good soldier, and doubtless we can work out some plan for cooperating with him and driving the rascals out of Krasnoyarsk. We'll talk it over tonight. And oh," he added, bethinking himself of Haxa, "will you guide a party to the plane? They can guard it tonight while you and your friend stay in camp with us."

To this I agreed willingly. Gajda would be awaiting our return. But if we could take back the promise of cooperation from a thousand old Army officers and Cossacks a night's delay would be well repaid.

Our conference that night with Colonel Usakov and a dozen of his chief advisers was lengthy, but it was concerned rather with ways and means than with any discussion as to the advisability of cooperating with Gajda. That they agreed to with the greatest of enthusiasm.

We learned they had been in the woods many weeks, but that only lately had they managed to concentrate their forces here. Until recently they had been doubling back and forth through the woods like hares in little groups, hounded by Red Guards. But the pursuit had died down, and this fact, they believed, was due to the withdrawal of Bolshevik forces to cope with the growing menace of us Czecho-Slovaks.

They listened with the keenest interest to our recital of our battles with the Bolsheviks, all of which was news indeed to them. That the Bolsheviks had attacked us they knew. But they were unaware that our successful resistance was wresting control of the railway from the Reds.

"Such being the case," said one officer hopefully, "it begins to look as though, if we cooperate with you fellows, we'll be able to overthrow the Bolsheviks in Siberia and set up a genuine Government."

To this Colonel Usakov gave emphatic assent.

"You can tell your Captain Gajda," he said, "that we'll be heart and soul with him."

When we left the next morning it was with the understanding that Usakov's thousand men would move up to the vicinity of Krasnoyarsk and would be ready to strike when Gajda approached from the west. Five or six thousand Red soldiers were at Krasnoyarsk, the exact number unknown. But with Usakov's thousand and Gajda's two thousand the Bolshevik superiority of two to one did not look impressive.

The sound of Gajda's guns would be the signal for Usakov's men to strike. And with that understanding Haxa and I flew away.

XVIII

OF THE capture of Krasnoyarsk there is nothing I can tell at first hand. Haxa's airplane got us safely back to Marinsk, but on the way gave evidences of being in difficulties, and after a cursory inspection he declared it would be unsafe to take to the air again until a good mechanic had given it a thorough overhauling. The last I saw of him he was going to hunt up his friend, Sergeant Gemelka, to see if the latter knew of an aviation mechanic in Gajda's forces.

Thus we could play no part in the capture of Krasnoyarsk from the air. But as the plane had done yeoman service there was nothing of which to complain.

Further, I saw nothing of the attack on the city from the ground, either. Gajda assigned me the task of obtaining supplies from the countryside because of my ability to speak to the peasants in their own tongue. It was a vitally necessary task, as for the time being no food was coming into Marinsk, and we had the townspeople as well as ourselves to consider.

While I was scouring the country at the head of a band of soldiers, knocking on the doors of peasant huts and trying to impress on them that we came with money in our hands to pay for whatever we took and not as the Bolshevik commissars, who were accustomed to drive off cattle, giving nothing but worthless receipts in exchange, Gajda left for Krasnoyarsk. He took only fifteen hundred men with him, leaving five hundred behind to look after the wounded and keep open the railroad.

But with this fifteen hundred he struck like a thunderbolt, while Lieutenant Colonel Usakov and his thousand anti-Bolsheviks hammered on the back door of the Red capital. Six hours from the firing of the first gun, Krasnoyarsk was in their joint possession, together with two thousand prisoners, large supplies of Army clothing, rifles, machine-guns, field-pieces and ammunition. That was on June 20.

To Gajda's disappointment the butchers comprising the Soviet of Krasnoyarsk made their escape by steamer on the Yenisei, bearing with them every scrap of gold which they could manage to wrest from the rich and the well-to-do of the city, as well as from the old public treasury. Thirty-six hundred pounds of gold, we were reliably informed, had been borne away.

Well for all concerned, if Gajda and Usakov had followed the rascals into the highlands to the south. For after reaching Minusinsk, three hundred miles away, the Soviet leaders set up another center of disturbance. During the ensuing year and a half they gathered a big force of rascals about them.

Then began again their fiendish work. After the dispersal of Kolchak's army—at this time not yet in existence, but which soon was to take its rise—the Minusinsk Soviet began anew the game of hunting down the old Army officers in the forest and of slaying all who rebelled at their bloody excesses. When the ice went out of the Yenisei in the Spring of 1920 the polluted torrent tossed on the flood-lands and into the willows along its banks clear up to Krasnoyarsk, the torn bodies of the Soviet's victims.

XIX

THE hardest nut of all to be cracked before we could hope to gain Vladivostok, hear from our comrades there, unite with them and proceed to France, still lay ahead. That was the routing of the Bolsheviks in the Irkutsk-Lake Baikal region and the seizure of the thirty-nine railroad tunnels through which the Trans-Siberian passes in circling about the southern end of the lake.

Early July found Gajda in front of Irkutsk. He had been promoted to a colonelcy by our Military Executive Committee and was in charge of operations. Thirty-five hundred men were in his command, inclusive of a portion of Colonel Usakov's anti-Bolshevik battalion comprising ex-Army officers and fierce, freedom-loving Altai Cossacks.

After the fall of Krasnoyarsk Gajda had swept the four or five hundred miles of railway intervening free of small bands of Bolsheviks and, extricating three beleagured echelons, had added them to his command. No longer would any man have to fight with sticks and stones for lack of proper weapons, as from the captured supplies of Krasnoyarsk Gajda had been able to arm and outfit his force in good style. He even possessed an armored train and considerable light artillery. As for the infantrymen, they had bombs and hand grenades as well as revolvers and rifles.

Moreover, our hold on the railroad was rapidly being consolidated. Working like beavers, our engineers had largely succeeded in making permanent repairs wherever the railroad had been cut and in restoring bridges. Our echelons were working forward from the west, bringing with them three other armored trains captured on the Volga to patrol the railroad between important centers. Everywhere anti-Bolshevik elements of the population were rallying under our protection and setting up democratic Governments.

In fact, when I considered the miracles accomplished in six hectic weeks I began to feel as if there were real hope of our ultimately cutting our way out of Siberia. The despair I felt at first had given way to optimism, and this was inspired by Gajda as largely as by anything.

I would not for a moment belittle in any way the fighting qualities, courage and resource of our soldiers and the various commanders of the echelons. God knows, isolated and alone in hostile country, they had demonstrated their ability to take care of themselves, every one. But here in central Siberia Gajda's was the genius which, like glowing flame, had fused all into a whole which swept everything before it.

But now would come the supreme test. And any man knowing the Lake Baikal region would be pardoned for wondering whether even Gajda with such men as our legionnaires at his back would succeed in overcoming all the obstacles that man and Nature would throw in the way.

To begin with, the investment of Irkutsk would be no light task. This city of one hundred and thirty thousand, capital not only of eastern Siberia but the great city of all that heart of Asia comprising eastern Siberia, Turkestan, Mongolia and Manchuria, would be hard to approach.

Although the railroad station is on the western bank of the Bela River, where it turns south toward Lake Baikal, forty miles away, the main portion of the city, reached by bridge, is on the opposite shore. Gajda would have to cross the river to get at the Bolsheviks. He could not afford to follow the railroad, leaving them in his rear.

Then would come the Baikal country. This great inland sea, shaped like a half-moon with the horns pointing westward, runs in a general north-and-south direction. It is four hundred miles long by fifty wide, or as wide as Lake Erie in the northern portion of the United States and one hundred and fifty miles longer. Hemmed in by lofty mountains, reaching a height of six thousand eight hundred feet on the southern shore where they are pierced by the Selena River, it affords for the most part only narrow foot-hold on a shelf of land between mountain and water.

Along this narrow shelf of land, over a route which is one of the most picturesque in the world, as I knew from having passed that way going and coming the previous year to Trans-Baikalia, runs the railroad. At places there are galleries holding back the mountain from sliding down on the track, somewhat akin to the snowsheds of the American Rockies which prevent snow-slides from blocking traffic. But at thirty-nine places in the fifty-mile stretch of track about the lake the shelf of land is not wide enough even for the railroad, and engineers found it necessary to tunnel.

Our fear was that if the Bolsheviks despaired of halting us otherwise they would block up these tunnels. Perhaps they would dynamite them. In that case, said our engineers familiar with the territory—as several were who had been through the region like myself—it would take a couple of years to restore the railway. And in the meantime we would be cut off in the heart of Asia, unable to go forward or backward.

To add to the difficulties, we learned the

Bolsheviks had seized a number of lake steamers and had mounted guns upon them. With these vessels patrolling offshore would be the added danger of a lucky shot from their batteries breaking down galleries or tunnels. At least their guns could command the open stretches of railroad unless we managed to mount batteries on the height above the tracks to keep them off.

For so far as depth of water was concerned they could stand as close inshore as they pleased. There is deep water up to the very foot of the mountains. In fact, Lake Baikal, deep everywhere, at some places attains a depth of four thousand feet, and that not far from shore.

This then was the situation as we approached Irkutsk, Gajda having added me to his staff.

XX

SO GAJDA may be said to have captured Irkutsk by means of an armored train and a gunboat. The armored train was that taken at Marinsk. The gunboat was also taken from the Reds. It was the *Siberiak*, a small excursion steamer upon which the Reds had mounted several light field-pieces as well as machine-guns, and which our old friend Sergeant Jan Gemelka, who had recovered from his blood poison, captured by surprize when it put into a river village above the city where he lay with a command of seventeen men scouring the country for supplies.

Warned by friendly peasants of the *Siberiak's* approach, Gemelka and his little band laid an ambush in a wood-yard. When the *Siberiak* with its crew of sixy men, all unsuspecting, steamed alongside the wood yard's little rickety pier for the purpose of obtaining fuel, the Czechs fired a volley, then charged. At close range, their fire was deadly. A dozen Bolsheviks fell.

Some leaped to the pier, some into the river. None attempted to resist. The boat was Gemelka's in five minutes.

In it he steamed triumphantly down the river toward Irkutsk.

In the meantime, unaware of the windfall which this little party of provisioners had obtained, Gajda had placed one hundred and twenty men aboard the armored train and sent it ahead to clear the railroad, while his main force crossed the river in boats to come down at the rear of the city.

Bolshevik bands holding the outlying villages were driven in one by one and the suburbs captured. At the end of four days, with his forces united, Gajda held all the northern and eastern outlets and was ready to move on the city.

We looked for a stern resistance. And as the Bolsheviks had between eight and ten thousand men opposed to our total of thirty-five hundred, not all of whom besides could take active part in the fighting by reason of wounds, the necessity for leaving adequate guards with our trains, *et cetera*, we certainly were not in for a picnic. Numbers of men of the Barnaoul Regiment, which had been nearest to Irkutsk at the time of our split with the Bolsheviks in May, loudly lamented their failure at that time to seize Irkutsk when the opportunity was within their grasp.

The story of these men, whose two echelons, holding a small station sixty miles west of Irkutsk when Gajda came up, had been the final addition to our forces, was one of hard luck. Late in May they had arrived in the vicinity of Irkutsk. They had failed to receive our warning from distant Cheliabinsk of the outbreak of hostilities, and when the Bolsheviks attacked them in the neighborhood of a big Red camp near the western limits of the city they were taken by surprize.

Their trains were in a small station, and the men were loitering about on the tracks. It had been raining hard, and they had come out to get the sun after the storm passed.

Suddenly bullets began to fly among them. Numbers were wounded, a dozen killed, and the whole outfit was thrown into confusion.

The firing came from woods on the left which approached close to the tracks, leaving a little clearing between in which stood the small wooden station and a few log shacks used by track laborers.

Although this act of treachery took the men totally by surprize, they were not long in recovering. Dashing for their *teplushkas,* they seized what rifles and revolvers they possessed, while those without arms gathered clubs and stones. The firing from the woods continued in the mean time, and to it now was added the *rat-a-tat-tat* of machine guns.

To stay was out of the question. To charge across that bullet-swept clearing at the enemy would be folly. The first thought of the men was to get out of range, and they tumbled from their *teplushkas* on the opposite side and dashed across a wide meadow and into the woods beyond. There they rallied, and after a hurried consultation it was decided to try to outflank the Reds.

The shouts of the latter, who had now left cover and were swarming over the deserted *teplushkas*, could be plainly heard. They were filled with triumph at having routed our men, and doubtless considered that we would scatter in terror over the countryside and that it would be an easy matter to hunt us down and slay us.

But the blood of our fellows was up. Keeping together, they moved rapidly under cover of the trees along a course paralleling the tracks toward the Red Vojensky camp. Some one remembered that at this camp were two thousand German and Magyar ex-prisoners who were being drilled in Bolshevik doctrines before being armed and placed in the Red Guards. Doubtless there would be large stores of rifles, ammunition and machine guns there. If the Czechs, supposedly fleeing in terror in the opposite direction, were to enter the camp suddenly they would stand a good chance of gaining these weapons.

If the Red Guards who had surprized our echelons had pursued at once and followed up their advantage our men would have been in a bad position. But as it happened the Reds halted to loot our echelons of the men's few poor possessions.

Thus when more than a thousand Czechs burst into the "education camp"—one of many such at that time dotting Siberia—they took the place by surprize. The few Red Guards on the ground fled without making resistance, and the Germans and Magyars, who had not yet been armed by the Bolsheviks, could do nothing but surrender.

The tables were turned. In little more than an hour from the time they were attacked our men had captured a camp and more than two thousand prisoners, and what was more to the point had gained possession of large stores of war supplies. With what eagerness those who heretofore had been unarmed now seized rifles and revolvers may be imagined. Even two batteries of field-pieces were amongst the captured stores.

Dispositions were made to resist attack in case the Reds who had driven them from their echelons arrived, and in the mean time somebody started the cry of "On to Irkutsk." As before noted, the men were in ignorance of the progress of events. They knew neither that Trotzky had issued Order Number 115 calling for their destruction or that our National Assembly at Cheliabinsk had replied by calling upon all Czecho-Slovaks to seize and hold strategic points on the railway. But from the attack made upon them it was not hard to draw the conclusion that the tension between Czechs and Bolsheviks, which had been growing ever since we left the Ukraine, had reached the breaking-point. Therefore, argued some, why would it not be best to march at once upon Irkutsk?

Enthusiastic approval greeted the proposal. But, evidently fearing this very thing, the fleeing Bolsheviks on reaching Irkutsk had taken steps to prevent it.

At that time they had not yet concentrated troops there, and therefore could not halt by force any move on the part of our troops to seize the city. But force was not the Bolsheviks' sole weapon, as soon became apparent when the American and French consuls of Irkutsk arrived at the Vojensky camp by automobile under protection of their national flags and begged our men not to attack Irkutsk.

They declared they wanted the city spared, and asked our troops to consent to a truce. Not knowing, as has been noted, of Trotzky's order or our own National Assembly's reply, consent was given.

Thus that chance to capture Irkutsk was lost, and by the time the truce ended the Bolsheviks had concentrated in such force that our troops not only dared not attempt the attack but even were forced to fall back.

That these consular officials were as ignorant as the Czechs of the true state of affairs, and that they had been told by the Bolsheviks that our men were the aggressors in the Vojensky incident, must be their excuse. Nevertheless, that they had failed to seize Irkutsk when it was in their grasp was bewailed now by those Czechs of our force who had been involved.

But the stout resistance we expected Irkutsk to make did not develop. On the night of the fourth day, having completed his careful investment of the city, Gajda called a number of us to a conference on the wide porch of a large country house where he had taken up headquarters that very day. It stood on a little rise looking down on a highway leading to Irkutsk, twelve miles away; and as the night was bright and clear the road lay plain below us.

As we were gathering, there came the sound of galloping hoofbeats, growing louder until a rider swung into view in the moonlight coming from the city. We stopped talking to gaze as the rider pulled up his horse in answer to a sentry's challenge. Then he came on again, turning up the drive, and, Gajda nodding to me, I went down the steps to meet him.

"Colonel Gajda?" he asked with a jerk in Russian; and I saw he was a tall, lean man whose soldierly bearing was evident even in the moonlight, but who was dressed in civilian clothes.

"He is here," said I. "What is your mission?"

"I must see him at once," he said. "The Bolsheviks are moving out of Irkutsk."

Running up the steps, I called to Gajda, who descended at once. After a word or two with the newcomer he called a soldier to take the latter's horse, then brought him up to us.

"It is true, gentlemen," said Gajda gravely. "They have escaped us. This good friend brings the news."

The newcomer was introduced as Captain Leo Mikovski. I had heard of him: in fact, we all had. He was one of Usakov's men. Possessing relatives in Irkutsk, he had volunteered for the dangerous task of penetrating the city to spy on the Bolsheviks.

We crowded around with eager questions. But what he had to say was soon told.

Finding they could not halt the triumphant progress of our armored train, which now, after taking four days to make sixty miles, was within measurable distance of the railroad station on the western bank of the Bela, the Bolsheviks had decided to withdraw their troops from Irkutsk across the bridge and flee by railroad to the Lake Baikal strongholds. Not alone were they alarmed by the onward march of the armored train and our investment of the city, moreover, but by word from up-river of the seizure of the *Siberiak* by Gemelka.

This was our first word of that addition to our forces. But at first blush it seemed to us surprizing that the Reds should fear a small excursion steamer, even though it mounted a few light guns. However, when Captain Mikovski told us that the Reds had sent all river craft to take Baikal and had nothing with which to oppose the *Siberiak*, and also that it was rumored in Irkutsk that Gemelka planned to fill the boat with explosives and send it against the bridge connecting the city with the railroad station, we could better understand their alarm.

Gajda issued rapid orders for an instant advance on Irkutsk, and we of the staff scattered through the night to rouse our various tired units and put them in motion.

XXI

WHEN I come now to write of the Lake Baikal campaign I feel dismayed. Yes, it is true, and may as well be admitted. If one of Ulysses' men had undertaken to write about the wanderings of himself and his comrades it seems likely he would not have composed Homer's epic. As for me, I recognize there are epic qualities in the tale of that Baikal campaign. But I was a part of it. My nose was against the canvas, so to speak.

It is true that, sitting here and living it over again in retrospect, I can realize that for three thousand five hundred Czechs and Slovaks supported by another thousand Russians and Cossacks, to attempt to drive away fifty thousand Bolsheviks, Germans and Magyars, was either sublimely foolish or sublimely heroic, but at any rate sublime.

It is true, too, that I can realize the epic qualities of the scene and situation. We were men casting all on a last desperate throw of the dice.

If we succeeded in wresting from the hosts of the enemy that thin steel ribbon—lying upon its narrow shelf on one side the blue waters of Baikal with eight Bolsehvik gunboats commanding every foot, on the other the mist-covered mountains whose vitals it pierced in thirty-nine places—then at last our retreat to the sea would be open.

But if we failed, our scattered troops, no matter how valiantly they might defend themselves, would be engulfed in the heart of Asia by the armies marshaling already to break our rear-guard grip on the Volga and the Urals in Russia and by those other hundreds of thousands in Siberia who, temporarily stunned at our audacity, had for the moment drawn off.

All these things, I say, I can realize.

Doubtless some greater writer than I and one who was not involved, could sit down and make something fine out of them. As for me, I can only tell what occurred as I saw it or heard about it in those crowded July days when we marched or fought for days on end without any more sleep than a man can get who drops in his tracks from exhaustion and is permitted by his comrades to lie undisturbed for a blessed half-hour or so; days when even Gajda took a shovel at times to help clear débris from a blocked tunnel.

Yes, it may seem epic to others, but to us it was labor of the hardest kind, with leg and back and arm muscles always strained to the breaking-point and with despair kept at bay only by the grimmest resolution and forever waiting around the corner to spring.

Scarcely had we entered Irkutsk in the early morning than Gajda learned the Bolsheviks in retreating had carried with them a trainload of high explosives for the expressed purpose of mining the tunnels and blowing them up at our approach. At all costs they must be prevented if possible from laying those mines. But how?

Rapid pursuit of the fleeing Bolsheviks was impossible, as scouts reported the railroad had been wrecked by their rear guard so thoroughly that it would require many days to put it in shape for the passage of trains. Engineers were put to work at once under protection of the guns of our armored trains.

But in the mean time pursuit had to be organized otherwise than on the railroad. An attempt must be made to intercept the dynamite train of the Reds, in fact to destroy it if possible before the explosives could be placed in the tunnels.

What we would have given for a bombing-plane at that moment! But none was available. We had only Lieutenant Haxa's machine, upon which a bomb or two might possibly be loaded. But even that was tied up awaiting repairs.

Any one familiar with machinery can understand how desperately situated we were at that time when anything like an airplane broke down. To obtain necessary parts and supplies was next to impossible. Our locomotives, for instance, were racketing to pieces, and if we could not soon obtain a breathing-spell in which to put them into railway shops at Irkutsk and elsewhere for general overhauling they would fall apart.

Without an airplane either to make observations or to drop bombs it was up to us to locate the dynamite train in some other fashion. And it was here Usakov's anti-Bolsheviks again proved their value. To them this affair was civil war. Their hatred of the Bolsheviks was cold, implacable.

Our successes had put new heart in them, given them the belief that they could save Siberia from the Reds. They would do anything, dare anything.

As spies they penetrated with the coolest audacity into the Bolshevik commands, hard upon the latter's retreat from Irkutsk. And presently they returned with information upon which Gajda was quick to act.

The train of explosives, they reported, was at Baikal station, on the southwestern tip of the lake. Although the Bolsheviks were determined to blow up the tunnels if necessary to halt our advance, they were reluctant to do so inasmuch as destruction of the tunnels would cut their country in half by blocking the chief channel of communication. Only as a last desperate resource would they venture to do so.

In the mean time, the explosives were not even being put in place as the Reds feared to use the tunnels once they were mined. Accordingly the dynamite train stood on a siding at Baikal station in a little meadow with the lake below and high mountains at its back.

Not far beyond Baikal station lay the town of Kultuk, keystone point as regards the tunnels. For up to Kultuk the shore of the lake was more or less flat, with the mountains separated from the lake by meadows. But beyond Kultuk the heights closed in to meet the water, and the vital series of railway tunnels began. If Kultuk could be captured, therefore, before the passage beyond it of the dynamite train, the Bolsheviks would be without explosives with which to mine the tunnels.

Gajda decided to make the attempt and detailed a column of five hundred men of mixed troops drawn from the Seventh Regiment and Major Hasek's battalion of Death's Head Hussars, our prize shock troops during our months on the Ukrainian front, to make their way through the mountains and attack Kultuk from the rear. Native Cossacks familiar with the territory went as guides.

The column left Irkutsk under cover of darkness, swinging across the bridge and then striking southwestward. Dawn found the men in wild mountain country where frequently the roads they must follow were mere goat-tracks along the steep walls of cliffs.

Moreover, the mountains were covered with mist, rains fell frequently, and the footing became more and more slippery and uncertain. However, the thick mists wrapped them in an impenetrable obscurity which would prevent their discovery by Bolshevik scouts, provided any were among those lofty precipices and heights.

And for three days and nights, with only brief halts for rest, they followed their guides through this wilderness like weary gray ghosts, the only sounds their own low-voiced conversation, the occasional rumble of thunder, the drum of the rain or the roar of near-by yet unseen waterfalls.

Before dawn of the third day they came down upon Kultuk from the rear. Rain had ceased. But night still shrouded the houses of the little town, and the first knowledge of their presence had by the sleeping Bolsheviks, who had not even taken the precaution of throwing out sentries on the mountainside, was when they were in among the houses.

Then while the main body of our troops made as much racket as possible, shouting, discharging their rifles, setting fires in a score of places, fifty volunteers struck swiftly away from Kultuk toward Baikal station.

These were to seize the train of explosives and, if it could not be moved, to waste no time in delay but to blow it up with bombs borne on that perilous trip across the mountain heights for this purpose. Luck was with them. Gajda had thrown forward from Irkutsk along the wrecked railway a screen of men to protect the engineers laboring at track repairs.

Of this body, an advance detachment of seven men with a machine-gun had managed to seize a gallery on the railway, far in advance of their comrades. It was one of those structures of timber, previously noted, built at an overhanging part of the mountain to prevent rock slides from covering the tracks.

Here they held on, fighting desperately, and as they had torn up a portion of the tracks just beyond their position toward Baikal station the Bolsheviks had been compelled to approach afoot and had been unable to dislodge them. At the time our fellows from Kultuk reached Baikal station the main guard of Bolsheviks there had just left to make an attack in force on the audacious seven who had kept them at bay now two days. Baikal was practically undefended.

When our fellows materialized out of the darkness, coming from Kultuk, guards over the train of explosives were stunned with surprize. The first Bolshevik guard encountered, as a matter of fact, mistook them for comrades. A Czech coming around the end of the train bumped unexpectedly into him.

"Ah, *Tovarish*," said the big Siberian eagerly. "You come from Kultuk? Have you any *mahorka?*"

The Czech without a word fished out of a pocket a packet of cigaret-papers and a small sack of *mahorka*, the Bull Durham of Siberia, and pressed both into the other's hands. As the Bolshevik put down his rifle and began to roll a cigaret the Czech seized him by the throat, and it was all over.

From the direction of the gallery where the seven Czechs were holding at bay a party of Bolsheviks ten times their number, came intermittent sounds of firing. To the raiders, ignorant of what was going on, it seemed possible that Gajda had attacked in order to create a diversion for them.

However, the sounds did not indicate engagement of any considerable body. It would not do to depend upon aid from that quarter. Therefore, realizing that the train could not be stolen, the raiders after overcoming the guards lost no time in going about setting their bombs.

While they worked like beavers in the growing grayness stealing across the lake from the east and heralding approach of dawn, nearing sounds of rifle fire in the rear indicated that the defenders of Kultuk had rallied and were rolling their attackers back on Baikal station. Such, indeed, was the case.

Wounded straggled in first, helping each other. Behind them, holding steadily together, came the main body. They had stirred up a hornets' nest in Kultuk, and several thousand Bolsheviks were pressing after them. Fortunately, however, the passage between lake and mountains was narrow, and the retreat could be made in good order.

When they saw our men in possession of Baikal station and the dynamite train the Bolsheviks held back in alarm. In fact, they halted to consider the situation.

This was all the time we asked. While the main body continued to retreat, putting a shoulder of the mountain between themselves and the dangerous proximity of that train of high explosives, the volunteers lighted their fuses and ran. Scarcely had they gained the shelter of that shoulder of mountain when the train blew up with a roar that shook the mountain and was, in fact, heard fifty miles away in Irkutsk.

The mountain about the lake echoed and reechoed the reverberations of that explosion. Baikal tossed and heaved and rolled great waves up against the cliffs. Masses of rock, torn loose, rolled down the mountainside, adding new notes to the titanic chorus as they struck the water and sent columns of spray high in the air. Dawn coming up out of the east revealed only a great red gash in the earth where Baikal station had stood.

Our men did not escape unharmed. Many were wounded more or less seriously by flying rocks, but luckily none were killed. What happened to the Bolsheviks from Kultuk it was not possible to say, although probably they, too, managed to escape the major force of the great blast by reason of the fact that a bend of the mountain was between them and the train.

The small Bolshevik force attacking our plucky seven defenders of the gallery was routed and added to our prisoners, and then the raiding-party threw up entrenchments and prepared to hold its advanced position on the railway line while word was sent back to Irkutsk of the *coup*.

XXII

MY OWN recollections of the ensuing six weeks are of incessant labor. As a staff officer under Gajda I had more work to do than under ordinary circumstances I would have believed it possible for one man to perform.

Trips to our ever-advancing front, interviews with factory heads who wanted to talk interminably—the Russians are great talkers—this, that and the other, filled every waking hour. And there were few hours for sleep.

Anti-Bolshevik political leaders were organizing the civil administration, and numerous conferences with them had to be held. Our troops had to be kept supplied with ammunition and food. It was a hectic time.

The need for haste was great. Lenin and Trotzky were massing more and more men against our Volga front, and the twelve thousand troops composing our rear guard were harder and harder pressed.

Siberia, it was true, was organizing anti-Bolshevik Governments under our protection, and the Reds were everywhere scattered. Yet it takes time to train armies, and although the Siberians were gathering forces together they were not yet worth much as fighters. No, our safe withdrawal depended upon our own efforts.

No longer did we think much of getting out of Siberia and making our way to France. We were primarily concerned with saving our own skins.

And the Reds were putting up a fierce resistance around Baikal. Every tunnel was obstructed and defended as if by lions, and we had to fight every foot of the way.

Once more troops making their way through the mountains attacked Kultuk from the rear while others advanced along the railroad, and finally after five days of incessant fighting the town fell and the Reds were driven back into the tunnels toward Mysavaya, a considerable town at the farther end of the series of tunnels. There they concentrated in force. At Mysavaya and at Verknie Udensk, fifty miles farther east, our anti-Bolshevik allies reported that a total of forty thousand Bolsheviks, Magyars and Germans were gathered.

All lake steamers had been commandeered by the Bolsheviks and upon eight of them stoutest guns had been mounted. To combat them and safeguard the engineers repairing the railroad along the lake shore we had first of all Gemelka's *Siberiak* and in addition two other boats. They were the *Theodosie* and the *Buriat*, small craft beached at the mouth of the Bela and out of commission two years, which were floated by us after two weeks of strenuous labor.

This little navy then put out upon the blue bosom of Baikal on a sunlit day when the mountains were mirrored in the water and started to chase away several Bolshevik boats which were menacing our workers near Baikal station. But at the very first shot from a field-gun mounted on her deck the *Siberiak* went out of commission. The deck was not strong enough to support the recoil, and the gun went crashing down into the hold.

Luckily the Bolshevik boats contented themselves with keeping a discreet distance while her consorts escorted the *Siberiak* back to the Bela, for if they had steamed up to close quarters it would have gone hard with our plucky craft, as the *Theodosie* amd the *Buriat* did not amount to much.

At the mouth of the Bela was an improvised shipyard where lay a number of large log rafts. These were being used for the transporation of our wounded back to the hospitals of Irkutsk, a thirty-six-hour journey. That, however, was a good deal smoother traveling than if the poor fellows had been taken overland. The tracks were not yet in shape for the passage of trains, and if they had gone by automobile or wagon over the rough road their sufferings would have been terrible.

Some of these log rafts were commandeered and strengthened, and on them were mounted heavier guns than our vessels could have supported—heavier, in fact, we believed, than any metal aboard the Bolshevik boats. Then our three little warships steamed out once more, this time each towing a floating battery behind.

Necessity breeds invention, certainly in war. The Confederates of Virginia demonstrated that by raising the sunken *Merrimac* and plating her with railroad iron, whereupon she steamed out of the James and wrought terrible execution among the blockading wooden frigates of the North until halted by that other ironclad, likewise bred of necessity, the steel turret on a raft named the *Monitor*.

Just so our floating batteries came into existence, and well they proved their worth. Steaming out of the Bela, the three little boats with floating batteries in tow attacked five armed steamers. Outgunned, one Bolshevik boat was sunk, and the others fled, crippled. They had not the hardihood of the captain of the *Congress*, who refused either to flee from the *Merrimac* or to surrender and went down with his colors flying.

After that these little wasps patrolled offshore to protect our advancing troops, and, aided by some batteries which we mounted on the heights, they compelled the Bolshevik gunboats to keep a respectful distance.

A small store of dynamite had remained to the Bolsheviks after we blew up their train. It was not sufficient to wreck a tunnel completely, but it was enough to block up Tunnel Thirty-Nine, in which they touched it off after retreating to Mysavaya, with a mass of débris reaching almost to the roof.

This tunnel, three hundred and fifty yards in length, was so choked with débris that to have cleared the old roadbed would have been a labor of months. As it was, officers and men alike wielding pick and shovel, working in shifts which kept the labor going night and day, it took three weeks to lower the level to a point which would give headroom for engines and cars. Then new tracks were laid on the remaining mass of débris.

All was now ready for the attack on Mysavaya. Colonel Gajda—now acting general—headed twelve hundred men approaching along the railroad. Another force of equal number and consisting of shock troops and of picked men from Usakov's command and from the Cossacks, proceeded aboard a ferry from Irkutsk under protection of our navy to a point twenty miles up the lake above Mysavaya. After landing this party, our boats with their floating batteries stood in toward Mysavaya harbor.

These three attacking forces converged upon the town at the same time. A lucky shot from our floating batteries set fire to an oil-tank on shore and caused an explosion which threw the Reds into panic.

Only one Bolshevik boat, a large converted steamer named the *Baikal*, was in the harbor. And it was set afire and burned to the water's edge.

These disasters struck panic into the Bolsheviks, who, although outnumbering us two to one, having more than five thousand soldiers in the town, fell back toward the rear of the town where the railroad turns away from the lake and finally fled in confusion, some by train, others on horseback, but many afoot.

XXIII

IT WAS now the middle of August. Gajda's spearhead of men had been fighting, marching, traveling, incessantly from the latter part of May.

The men were worn, their clothing in

rags, but their spirits indomitable. Winning troops can withstand hardships under which men on the run would drop. And victory had been with us continually in face of the greatest odds.

But even though Mysavaya had fallen the men could not yet be given a rest, for our grip on the Lake Baikal region would not be assured until the Bolshevik center at Verknie-Udensk was broken up and the Reds from Mysavaya who had sought shelter at Troitskavask, on the Mongolian border to the south, were routed.

An expedition of five hundred Czechs and Slovaks set out for Troitskavask, some marching afoot, others going by two small steamers on the Selena River. How many Bolsheviks had taken refuge in this wild settlement in the Altai range we did not know. But five hundred were all Gajda could spare. However, the word came back two weeks later by the telegraph line which the Bolsheviks had destroyed but our men had restored, that the Reds, although three thousand strong, had not awaited their attack but had fled into the Gobi Desert.

In the mean time Colonel Usakov undertook a mission which proved fatal to him, but the successful initiation of which constituted one of the most heroic incidents of the campaign. This tall Russian, who upon the collapse of Russian arms had made his way in disguise to his old home near Krasnoyarsk, had long been a thorn in the side of the Bolsheviks before he united forces with us.

During the Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Baikal campaigns he had been of the greatest assistance to Gajda. Many a time we would have been in difficulties if it had not been for information obtained by his daring spies. He himself was always in the thick of the fighting, and his coolness, intrepidity and resourcefulness made his name known to every man in our ranks.

Now he undertook to lure the Bolsheviks of Verknie-Udensk into a trap, and to that end took eighty men of his anti-Bolshevik command with him and proceeded aboard one of our small steamers to the lake port of Rosselskaya by night. Landing at dawn, he was met by a Red commissar whom he took in completely with his statement of being a Bolshevik guerrilla commander from the opposite side of the lake.

This little port of Rosselskaya was beyond the Czech lines and some twenty miles from Verknie-Udensk, on the southern or eastern shore of the lake. From it the southern horn of the lake curves away to the westward where lies the region of the tunnels.

"In the mountains behind the Czechs," he confided, "a number of us guerrilla commanders are gathering our forces. But we need ammunition and supplies. If our comrades of Verknie-Udensk will hasten these to us and will move forward to threaten the Czechs and engage their attention, we will cross the mountains and fall upon the Czech guards at the tunnels. Then the Czechs will be caught between two fires and destroyed."

So glowingly did he paint his picture that the Red commissar was not only completely taken in but became enthusiastic over the scheme. He himself undertook to telegraph the Verknie-Udensk Soviet, and, in fact, did so while Usakov was present.

How delighted were the Bolsheviks! Doubtless they were surprized to learn that any Bolshevik guerrillas existed in the Baikal mountains despite our occupation. Nevertheless they did not express the least doubt. On the contrary they agreed to rush infantry and artillery at once along the railroad toward Mysavaya.

This was what Usakov had been playing for. He wanted to lure the Bolsheviks out of their natural stronghold at Verknie-Udensk and get them into the open. So now he replied that he would await the Bolsheviks at Rosselskaya. Then while he talked with the Red commissar, a number of his men slipped away and hastened toward Mysavaya.

When they arrived with word of what Usakov had accomplished the Barnaoul Regiment was sent forward on horseback together with Usakov's anti-Bolsheviks and Cossacks. Making a wide détour, they came down upon the railroad near Verknie-Udensk.

The Bolsheviks already had passed. Train after train our men had seen proceeding toward Mysavaya as they rode through the distant hills. So now they dismounted and resorted to Gajda's old trick; namely, cutting the railroad.

Then, remounting, they hastened forward to the attack. In the mean time Gajda came out of Mysavaya. And finding themselves between two fires, advance or retreat alike cut off, the Bolsheviks surrendered without any serious resistance.

Six echelons and forty field-pieces were captured, together with more than four thousand prisoners.

But the Red commissar of Rosselskaya, suspecting Usakov's duplicity, killed him with a revolver-shot at the beginning of the engagement which both had hastened to join.

Thus ended the career of a man whose individual efforts had gone far to restore sane rule in Siberia, and whose advice and strength would have been of inestimable value in the stormy days ahead for that country.

Verknie-Udensk fell a few days later, the remaining Bolsheviks fleeing into the Yablonovoi Mountains to the east, where they broke up into guerrilla bands that harassed us but no longer had the power to do more than sting. Thousands of Germans and Magyars who formed part of this force drifted down into Mongolia, some eventually reaching Chinese ports, others falling victim to one side or other in that disturbed country where the Mongols under their religious leaders, the Living Gods of Uliassutai and Urga, were battling with the Chinese.

XXIV

NEAR Chita on the Manchurian border, five hundred miles east of Irkutsk, we met our comrades who, reaching Vladivostok in April with General Dieterichs, had been fighting their way westward to come to our rescue.

We hardly knew them in their new French style of uniform. Only small bands composed the two forces which first met, and of this comparative handful—a detachment of two hundred and fifty men from Gajda's forces, and a somewhat larger number on the other side—I was fortunate enough to be one.

As our train rolled into a small wooden station on the sunlit steppe in the afternoon of a late August day we could see some figures in smart uniform watching us from beside the track.

We knew they were not Bolsheviks, as all the latter in this region had scattered to the four winds. Besides we were now in Semenov's territory. Could they be some of that *ataman's* followers? But no; as we leaped from the train they ran forward, shouting to us in our own tongue. Then we realized they were our comrades.

What a babel that night about the campfires on the open steppe, while each explained to the other what had occurred at his end of the line! They had no more definite information about us than we about them. As for me, remembering the purpose for which Gajda had sent me forward, which was to obtain definite news about events in Vladivostok and report to him at Irkutsk, I hunted up the commander. And Captain Stronski and I withdrew to his train—he was traveling in style, a first-class compartment—where we compared notes.

The story of Vladivostok was soon told. General Dieterichs' force, traveling across Siberia before the Bolsheviks inaugurated their policy of delaying and disarming us, reached the Pacific port with weapons in hand.

Some Japanese and American warships were in the harbor, and it did not appear that Dieterichs' men would have anything to fear. Nevertheless, camp was made on the outskirts and precautions against being surprized were taken, as whenever our men encountered members of the Bolshevik garrison an ugly spirit was beginning to be manifested.

It soon became apparent that from large stores of arms and ammunition in their possession the Bolsheviks were sending supplies into the interior. And when word reached General Dieterichs that these arms were going to camps of German and Magyar ex-prisoners of war, who were receiving instruction in Bolshevism, he feared for the safety of the Czecho-Slovak legions making their way across Siberia behind him. All the more was this so, as by now he was well aware by means of telegraphic advices of the Bolshevik attitude toward them.

"Then late in May," explained Captain Stronski, "we learned from the officers of the American cruisers that hostilities between you fellows in western Siberia and the Bolsheviks had begun. Their consular officials had informed them. But we had no idea of the extent of the affair at first.

"We knew nothing of Trotzky's order for the Bolsheviks to disarm and intern us, nor of our leaders' declaration of war. Immediately the Bolsheviks closed the wires not only to us but to our American and Japanese allies, and after that for a long time only fragmentary rumors reached us. We knew serious trouble had arisen, but could not gage its extent. We felt certain, however, that it was serious.

"Our own condition was none too comfortable. From their arms depots the Bolsheviks were sending large supplies to Germans and Magyars in the interior.

"They did not dare attack us as yet, because we were too numerous and well-armed for the Vladivostok garrison to cope with, as well as having the support of the allied warships in the harbor. But we realized that if the arming of German and Magyar ex-prisoners of war went on for long there soon would be forces converging on the port which would make our situation precarious. Even though we would be able in all likelihood to protect ourselves, yet we would be bottled up and unable to go to your rescue; and that was something which soon would have to be done, it was clear.

"Accordingly General Dieterichs requested the Vladivostok Soviet to discuss matters with him and our staff. A formal arrangement was concluded June 20 by the terms of which the Bolshevik troops were to confine themselves to the fort on the peninsula and to their barracks in the city. This was to avoid friction between our respective forces. Moreover, no arms were to be sent out of Vladivostok except on formal order from the Soviet, bearing our endorsement. That, of course, meant no arms at all were to be allowed to go out.

"Such an arrangement could not endure long, and in fact we soon had evidence that arms were being sent into the interior in direct violation of the agreement. So strained in fact did relations become that one week from the signing of the agreement our leaders decided to seize Vladivostok. It was a duty we owed to our comrades in the west to keep the port and railroad open to them.

"The night of June 28 we occupied the low hills behind the city, and the following day a cordon of troops surrounded the hall in which the Soviet was meeting and delivered an ultimatum for the surrender of the fort, the various barracks and the supply depots within a half-hour together with the disarming of all Red Guards.

"The Soviet members sought to temporize on the ground that M. Suchanov, their President, was absent. Thereupon they were placed under arrest.

"Our troops proceeded to surround the Naval Barracks, the Naval Club and the Druga Rijecka buildings in the heart of the down-town district which were used as barracks, disarming marines, naval officers, militia and Red Guards almost without resistance. But the garrison of the fort, mainly composed of Germans and Magyars who already had joined the Bolsheviks, refused to surrender.

"It was four o'clock in the afternoon when finally, after giving them every opportunity to surrender, we moved to the attack. Their guns were mostly antiquated models and did little execution, but their rifle fire—well, there was nothing the matter with it. We suffered heavy losses.

"Early in the affair four torpedo boats steamed out of the harbor to fire on our attacking party, but the commander of the Japanese cruiser *Asachi* swung his ship across their path and warned them if they opened fire on us he would sink them with his heavier guns.

"At six o'clock we were so close to the bastions of the old fort that orders to carry it by storm were given. Our men rushed forward in three columns. On its fourth side, the fort is protected by the water.

"The bastions are low. Grassy slopes running up to them made approach easy. And our troops approached closely enough in the first rush to fling hand grenades through the embrasures, setting fire to a stock of printing-paper. The Bolsheviks possessed a printing-press in the fort and from it had been issuing their proclamations.

"Although the first attack was driven off, we had the satisfaction of seeing flames spreading rapidly through the fort. And in a few minutes, a white flag was hoisted.

"With the surrender of the fort, Vladivostok with its spacious harbor, its railroad shops and all its vast quantities of war material of every conceivable sort was in our possession."

Captain Stronski leaned forward, tapping my knee to emphasize his next statement.

"You have no idea of the amount of war supplies there," he said. "Shoes, uniforms, leather, copper, tanks, airplanes, field-pieces, big cannon, ammunition, canned foods, all are piled indiscriminately on the docks of Vladivostok rotting, rusting, deteriorating.

"They were ordered from abroad, from America and Japan quite largely, by the old Czarist Government. But when they arrived at Vladivostok the facilities for storing them until they could be shipped by the Trans-Siberian Railway to the front were totally inadequate. Therefore they were piled indiscriminately on the water front. They were still there when the Revolution came.

"You should see Captain Sip," he continued, sitting back again and smiling. "He has orgainzed a Legionnaire Savings Bank among us fellows of the Vladivostok force. We have been receiving regular pay from the loan negotiated by Professor Masaryk and the leaders of our Paris Committee from France. Eighty francs a month for privates, and officers accordingly. You fellows will begin to get that shortly, too, now that we have reestablished communication.

"Well, Captain Sip used to be a banker in Prague, and this savings-bank idea of his took so well with us that already he has large funds in his control. He declares he will invest the money in some of these supplies, especially the raw cotton, leather and copper. The new anti-Bolshevik Government will sell to him at 1914 and 1915 prices, and he believes that by shipping them home at the end of the war he'll be able to command top prices that will return us all a tremendous profit."

I smiled at Captain Stronski's enthusiasm. How was I to foresee that Captain Sip's project was sound, and that within a few years he would have carried it to triumphant conclusion? How was I to look into the future only two years and foretell that shares in the savings bank presently to be sold us for two hundred francs would in 1920 be quoted in Prague at six thousand francs? Or that the Legionnaire Savings Bank thus organized amongst our wandering legions would be transferred to Prague and become one of the greatest banking institutions of the city?

No, that smile was meant for dismissal of a subject which did not particularly interest me. I wanted to hear of how the Vladivostok Czecho-Slovaks regained possession of the railroad throughout Trans-Baikalia, that portion of Siberia between Vladivostok and Lake Baikal. I wanted to learn what, if anything, the Allies were doing or planning to do to aid us, and what our chances were of reaching France that Summer.

"After our capture of Vladivostok," Captain Stronski resumed in answer to my questions, "the inhabitants, who at the beginning of the shooting had barricaded themselves within doors, poured into the streets and had a wild time. That they were not generally favorable to the Bolsheviks was apparent. Many spat at the members of the Soviet when they were led through the streets under escort and shouted that they were glad to be rid of the tyrants.

The leading men of the old days came out of hiding and set up a new Government with M. Agarev, their former mayor, in his old position. A militia was formed to police the city, and we turned the civil administration over to the new crowd.

"Then we started working backward over the northern branch of the railway, which, roughly speaking, follows the Amur River to Chita, while the southern branch cuts across Manchuria to the same point. Near Khabarovsk we encountered an army of ten or twelve thousand Reds. Our two regiments, the Eighth and the Fifth, were slightly outnumbered, but after two days of furious fighting we captured the strong position of Nikolsk Ussurijsk, July fifth.

"The Reds fell back, adding new forces to their command, and on July sixteenth at the river Ussuri, not far from Khabarovsk, we came up with them again. From then until August first it was a continuous battle with neither side gaining the advantage. Oh, those Bolsheviks in the east were well organized and led, and had besides numerous Germans and Magyars who are good fighters.

"At that time, while matters between us were inconclusive, Allied troops began to arrive. While the Fifth Regiment held the line with them, the Eighth went back to Vladivostok and transferred to the Manchurian branch of the railroad.

"That route has been comparatively easy. We have had some brushes with Bolshevik bands, but nothing to amount to much. So here we are in Olovjanne station; out there is the Onon River, not far away is Chita. And the road to Vladivostok and France is open, unless——"

Captain Stronski paused, and after the silence had endured several minutes—

during which the laughter of our mingled commands, followed by a sudden rousing Czech chorus in which hundreds of voices joined, came to us on the cool night air, fragrant with the scent of the plains, from the steppes outside—I asked anxiously what he meant.

"Well," said he, "it begins to look as if we were not to be permitted to leave Siberia."

"Not leave Siberia?"

He nodded.

"Just that," he said. "The Allies have been alarmed at the growing cordiality between the Bolsheviks and Germany. They feel that we can serve the common cause far better by staying here than by going to France. We have prevented repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Germans and Magyars by our seizure of the Trans-Siberian. Had these men been allowed to continue making their way home they would have reconstituted a German army outweighing for a time all the men America is sending to France.

"Moreover, we have defeated the German and Austrian ambitions to draw upon Siberia's granaries for food for their starving armies and peoples. Now if we withdraw at this crucial time the infant Siberian Governments will collapse before the Bolshevik advance. And who knows but what the men and supplies her Bolshevik tools would furnish to Germany would succeed in turning the scale?

"I tell you, Captain Broz," he added gravely, "you do not know, of course, because you have not been in touch with affairs in Europe, but Germany is making one last desperate play this Summer. And as the Allies are near the end of their rope, it is touch and go. If Germany and Austria win their ends in Russia and Siberia they may be able to defeat the Allies yet. It is up to us."

"Well," said I, "it is a disappointment, of course. But if fight we must, one place is as good as another. However, I can tell you that unless the Allies send us support both of men and supplies we can't hold out forever. Fifty or sixty thousand men can perform miracles. We have demonstrated that. But for how long?"

"That is true," he said. "Yet Japanese, American, British and French troops have been promised us, and some already have arrived. As for supplies, France has made us a national loan, and other things doubtless will be forthcoming."

XXV

CAPTAIN STRONSKI'S summary of the situation was correct. And only a few days later, in early September, came official orders from our Paris Committee, constituting the *de facto* Government of Czecho-Slovakia to which the Allies had promised freedom of our homeland in event of ultimate Allied victory, turning our legions back to the border of European Russia for the purpose of setting up a western front on the Volga River and the Urals which would bar the forces of Moscow and the Central Empires from access to Siberia.

Here then may be said to have ended our historic retreat, a retreat without a parallel in history. Ill-armed, ill-equipped, scattered in small units unable at the first onslaught of the enemy to support one another, we had resisted treacherous attack and had joined forces to accomplish the impossible.

Starting from the vicinity of Kiev in the Ukraine, actually only seven hundred miles east of the city of Prague and only three hundred miles from the nearest point on the border of our homeland, fifty thousand men had cut their way a distance of six thousand five hundred miles to the sea. The entire Trans-Siberian Railway from the Volga River in Russia to Vladivostok on the Pacific was in our possession. The safe withdrawal of all our forces would have been an accomplished fact if we had been permitted to carry out our original intentions.

Therefore I say the story of our retreat here logically comes to an end.

But there was more, much more, to come. And as much of what followed is considerably better known to the world than is the story of those events up to this point, I shall be brief in the telling.

While we were fighting our way out of Siberia, there were no journalists with us to record the tale of our deeds. But following our juncture with the Allies, correspondents poured into Siberia. And of succeeding events they already have written much.

When it was decided that we should stay in Siberia, general headquarters was moved to Vladivostok. I was sent thither, and so saw little at first hand of subsequent events until the Fall of 1919, at which time I was again on the western front when Kolchak's Army began to crumble. Of the tragic times succeeding when again our safety was endangered and it seemed we Czecho-Slovaks would be engulfed in the general disaster, I shall presently write.

But first it is necessary to sketch briefly the course of events up to that point.

To begin with, all our Czecho-Slovak troops were rolled back clear across the vast breadth of Siberia to set up a front on the Volga in the early Fall of 1918. Mobilization of all Czecho-Slovaks in Siberia was ordered, and as a result an additional fifty thousand compatriots who had been former prisoners of war and who were scattered throughout that vast territory were drawn to our standard, thus bringing our numbers to the total of one hundred thousand.

Lithuanian, Italian and Rumanian ex-prisoners likewise flocked to our support. The new Siberian Governments, at first local but soon gathering to a head under the All-Russian Government of Omsk, also began to recruit.

General Dieterichs was made commander-in-chief of these combined forces, and Gajda as our foremost military genius was placed in command in the field. His thin steel line, facing Bolshevik Russia on the Volga and the Urals, stretched eight hundred miles from north to south. He had perhaps one hundred and fifty thousand men. And when one considers that Lenin and Trotzky, spurred on by the Kaiser, had gathered an army of at least a half-million to hurl against him it can be seen his situation was none too secure.

Too much was builded on Allied promises. It is true one French and two British battalions and a British coast battery did reach our western front. But other than that Allied aid did not amount to much.

Japanese troops penetrated as far as Irkutsk, while American and British contingents guarded Vladivostok. But it was neither at Irkutsk nor Vladivostok that we were threatened.

However, in the midst of our anxieties came wonderful news to uplift every man and make him feel like ten. We heard first of the successful *coup* in Prague, October 15, whereby Austrian rule was overthrown, our homeland set free after centuries of oppression, and the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia was born into the world. A month later came the word that Germany had collapsed and that the armistice had been signed.

In our folly we thought that now we would be allowed to go home. Inflamed though we were against the Bolsheviks both because of their treachery toward us and of their terroristic and undemocratic practises, yet we felt we had no particular call to continue taking sides in what, with the ending of the World War, became a matter of civil strife between contending political parties. Nations are best left to work out their own destinies without interference by outsiders.

But although a change came in the situation we were not permitted to go home. An attempt was made by the Allies to reach an aggreement between the Bolsheviks and the other Russian political parties in conference on the Prince Islands. While it was under way we were withdrawn from the western front, which was turned over to the newly recruited Siberian armies, and were assigned the work of controlling and protecting the Trans-Siberian from the Urals to Irkutsk.

What had been intended as a period of repose, during which our troops could rest from their titanic exertions, became with the failure of the Prince Island conferees to reach an agreement a season of endless guerrilla warfare. For the Bolshevik forces which we had dispersed the previous Summer reappeared in strong flying columns, operating on both sides of the railway with the object of damaging the railroad so that on the resumption of hostilities in the Urals the following Spring the Siberian anti-Bolshevik forces would be isolated and unable to receive Allied support from Vladivostok.

Although I was in Vladivostok I could visualize as well as if I had been with them the terrible Winter spent by our men. Instead of keeping warm indoors in garrison they must be out on the icy steppes, maintaining ceaseless patrol of the railway. With temperatures ranging from twenty to fifty degrees below zero, with Arctic blizzards raging days on end and the ground never free from snow, they shoveled through mountain-high drifts, pursued raiders across the frozen wastes, pushed their trains up slight grades for miles when the broken-down locomotives succumbed to the iron frost and refused to pull any more, and between times huddled miserably in their thin-walled *teplushkas.*

Many a man lost a hand or a foot from frost-bite which went so deep before he could obtain aid that the dead member had to be amputated. Noses and ears mutilated by frost became common.

As rapidly as possible, now that the railroad was under our complete control, the men were transferred to second-and third-class coaches which could be made more comfortable. But up to the end, many of our echelons continued in their flimsy *teplushkas.*

More than four hundred punitive expeditions, it has been computed, were launched that Winter into the frozen wilderness in pursuit of Bolshevik guerrillas. Often our detachments traveled hundreds of miles. Camping in the Siberian *taiga,* the men soon learned to build the *naida* of Siberian prospectors in the fashion the Smolu brothers had demonstrated to Kober and me on our Moscow expedition. And this alone made such long trips possible. Ordinary fires would not have done much to dispel that gripping cold and keep men alive.

Not until June did the guerrilla bands, which our troops pressed harder and harder as Spring advanced, disappear and leave us in undisputed possession of the railway. And by then our troops were worn to shadows of their former selves.

Siberian Governments had risen and fallen, and now Admiral Kolchak became head of the All-Russian Government, with headquarters at Omsk of all places, announcing himself dictator and supreme ruler. History will have to judge Kolchak. As for us Czecho-Slovaks, we regretted the fall of the democratic Government and the creation of a dictatorship. Nevertheless, obeying orders, we continued to support him.

For a time Kolchak's fortunes seemed to prosper. Recruits flocked to his standard, and with the return of a portion of our forces to the western front he had two hundred thousand men under arms. Once again Gajda was in command in the field.

But Kolchak and Gajda could not agree. The dictator was all for marching into Bolshevik Russia, believing he could take Moscow and bring European Russia under his control. Gajda pointed out that the better plan would be to conduct a defensive warfare, keeping the Bolshevik armies out of Siberia while at the same time stabilizing conditions at home.

Certainly affairs in Siberia needed stabilizing. Bolshevik emissaries were at work everywhere, stirring up the peasants against the dictator. And the peasants were leaving their crops to rot on the ground that Summer rather than take them to the cities.

"All our troubles come from the cities," they said. "Let them starve."

Forests were full of game, rivers of fish, fields of crops. But none of this wealth of food found its way to the cities.

Instead of going about the business of rectifying this state of affairs, however, Kolchak dreamed only of making his an All-Russian Government in name as well as in fact. He ordered Gajda to advance on Moscow.

The line moved forward. It was successful at first everywhere. But it was a line eight hundred miles long, held by only two hundred thousand men with no reserves behind them.

And hardly had a few preliminary successes been experienced than the blow fell. An entire division of Siberian troops went over to the enemy, and through the gap thus created the Bolshevik host began to pour. At the same time the Murmansk campaign against the Bolsheviks in the far north and General Yudenitch's expedition against Petrograd both collapsed. Thus additional Bolshevik troops were released to be flung against Gajda's slender forces.

Gajda managed to extricate his troops without disaster, a feat which military strategists of the future when they come to study it will acclaim one of the finest examples of military genius in history. Once more he reunited his forces on the Tobol River, and for two months longer held the Bolsheviks at bay.

At the end of that time, entirely out of sympathy with Kolchak and broken in health besides by his strenuous mental and physical activities, Gajda resigned. General Syrovy, another of our young commanders who had risen from the rank of captain, became commander-in-chief of our forces.

When Gadja reached Vladivostok, Russians hostile to Kolchak and fascinated by our young commander's record and personality begged him to head a revolutionary movement. He refused, saying all he desired was to return to Czecho-Slovakia.

I saw him in the crowd which came down to the dock to cheer him on departure, and what was more he saw and recognized me. His face lighted up with a rare smile as he gripped my hand, and for a moment he was the old Gajda who had made us ordinary young mortals perform the tasks of demigods around Lake Baikal the year before under the inspiration of his presence. Then the smile faded, and the tired lines reappeared in his face, and I would have sworn he had aged ten years in one.

He had not been gone long from that wretched land, for which he had done so much and been so ill repaid, when there came the beginning of the end. Riddled with Bolshevik propagandists, ill fed, poorly clad, badly led, the Siberian army early in October was in full retreat and the Reds were advancing behind them from the Urals at the rate of fifteen miles a day.

The last act in this drama, not only of Kolchak but of our Czecho-Slovak legions, it was my privilege—or otherwise as one may decide—to see. For I, who had been begging for months to be relieved of desk routine at Vladivostok headquarters, at length found my request granted. I was sent to the front to serve on General Syrovy's staff, and arrived at Omsk only one day ahead of the vanguard of the Great Retreat.

XXVI

AS I lay asleep in our train in the station at Omsk the next morning I was awakened by a brother officer shaking me. He pointed out of the window, and my gaze followed his direction. It was raining, and all I could see was an unpaved street lined with low log houses on either side, while making their way up the middle, through mud ankle-deep, were some men who looked like beggars. Their legs were wrapped in burlap sacking; ragged blankets were thrown over their shoulders, and shawls were tied around their heads.

"What do you mean?" I asked stupidly, gazing up at my comrade.

"The vanguard of Kolchak's army," he replied.

Then I noticed the rifles trailing on the ground. But, oh, how tired they looked! Their shoulders sagged. They kept no military formation. And the mute despair of those bowed backs was a thing defying description.

While I dressed the thought kept running through my head of what a lonely, dreary stage for empire-building Kolchak had selected. In the midst of this treeless steppe, six feet deep with snow in Winter, wind-burned and brown in Summer when the only break in the endless monotony is an occasional horseshoe-shaped cluster of Tatar *yurtas*, Omsk is cut off from all civilization.

The thin steel ribbon of the Trans-Siberian merely accentuates its isolation. The log huts on every hand and the unpaved streets down which gallop Mongols on unclipped ponies bumping into caravans of camels, merely heighten the impression of the frontier.

From brother officers on my arrival the night before I had learned of the tremendous overcrowding. Before the advancing Bolsheviks whole villages and tribes from the west had sought refuge in Omsk. The normal population of one hundred and twenty thousand had grown almost overnight to six hundred thousand.

Kolchak's housing commission had compelled every door to open and admit refugees. Many a one-story log house held fourteen to twenty people.

Sanitary conditions had become frightful with advent among the refugees of the dread spotted typhus. The dead contaminated the living, and Omsk had become a city of living dead.

Fortunately our own troops had been withdrawn to their task of railroad control by General Syrovy upon his appointment, and so there seemed little likelihood that they would be involved in the great disaster that now threatened. General Syrovy had been implored to throw them into battle to bolster Kolchak's army. But he felt that the dictator's cause was hopeless and refused to involve his men in the approaching collapse. Nothing they could do would long stave off Kolchak's defeat, he firmly announced, and his first duty now was to see that his men got safely away.

Already our troops were pouring eastward toward Vladivostok in the hope that the majority at least could be evacuated and started home by ship around Asia before Winter closed down once more on the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was hardly likely that we would get home before the next Spring or Summer.

Ten thousand men, comprising the rear guard, were being held by Syrovy in the west to cover withdrawal. Of this number a picked company formed part of Kolchak's personal bodyguard at the dictator's request.

Day after day the retreating soldiers of Kolchak's army continued to straggle through the city. It required no prophet to predict that they would soon drift into the Bolshevik ranks. Emissaries of the latter were everywhere, and the promised pay of twenty to thirty rubles a day together with the best of food and clothing seemed like paradise to the poor fellows. Realizing that the troops no longer could be depended upon, Kolchak's generals decided not to hold the city, and at the close of the month ordered evacuation.

Frightful were the scenes as all those hundreds of thousands of refugees who had put their homes behind them and fled to Omsk for shelter now found that they must flee again, out into the frozen wastes where Winter once more was closing down, with no destination, no place to lay their heads.

They crowded the railroad station and yards. And when they found a scarcity of second and third-class coaches, due to the fact that we had been routing our departing troops in them, what invectives they heaped upon us!

They forgot it was we who had freed them from the Bolshevik terrorists in the first place, that it was we who had given them a freedom they were proving unable to retain themselves. They forgot that the *teplushkas* they scorned were the very ones in which we had lived and fought so many months.

Packing *teplushkas* to the last limit of capacity, the refugees rolled away day after day to the east without seeming to make any sensible diminution in the remaining hordes. When I think of those packed cars of refugees, bearing the germs of plague, I shudder.

Ordinarily the first week in November would have found the Irtish frozen solid, but the end of November found the ice still too soft that year to bear the weight of numbers. Therefore when it was decided that the evacuation of the troops no longer could be delayed, due to the near approach of the Bolsheviks, the only way of retreat open was across the long, narrow bridge to the east.

For three days and nights the bridge was choked unendingly with sullen troops, guns, horses, transport carts, while the panic-stricken refugees, unable to get out of Omsk in any other way, were forced to wait their turn.

Some of Kolchak's ministers still entertained the hope that those discontented soldiers could be reorganized and persuaded at a later date to fight. But not another shot did they ever fire for Kolchak. In companies and whole regiments, they drifted over to the Bolsheviks until not a man was left to shoulder a gun for the lost cause of the dictator and supreme ruler of all the Russias.

But whatever else is said about Kolchak, there can be no question of his courage. He stayed until the last minute, until November 13, the eve of Bolshevik entry from the west, before he would leave his capital.

Soldiers had departed. His most trusted officials had fled. He was alone. At length with his bodyguard of Czechs, bearing his archives and the Government treasure consisting of a gold reserve in coin and bullion of one hundred millions of dollars, he took his departure.

Syrovy had left with us of the staff only an hour before. Almost Kolchak was too late, for a Bolshevik force crossed the river to the north where colder weather had caused it to freeze solid and came down on the east bank to cut off his retreat. They missed him only by a margin of miles.

Never shall I forget that trip to Irkutsk. The snow was six feet deep. And along the railroad for hundreds of miles after leaving Omsk ran the never ending line of refugees, a long, thin, black line of sorrow and suffering and death traced upon the white background of the snow.

Often during our slow progress we could see beside the railroad, which the refugees hugged as if its proximity gave them a sense of protection, the bodies of those who had succumbed to frost, starvation or plague. Frozen, immobile in death, they lay like fallen statues.

Sometimes we could hear them singing. Over the snow in the white moonlight, in the sad gray twilight or in the stillness of dawn, would come that song. Always the same, it was the song of the refugees of Omsk.

We could never distinguish the words of the haunting, dirge-like air until once at a little station I heard one of Kolchak's ragged soldiers singing the words in a low voice while his sad blue eyes gazed far-off into the frozen waste, and I asked him to repeat it for me.

The song ran:

My wife is dead; my children are lost;
  All that remains is my little *charaban* (sledge).
I have loaded it with the chair on which my mother sat,
  And the old table where my father toiled;
All my home is now in my little *charaban*.
  Away, away, out into the limitless plain,
Seeking new shelter in a strange land,
  I set out with my little *charaban*.

Who composed the words? Or who the air? Who can tell? Some poet of this strange race which seems able to suffer more and to do less about it than any race on earth. As the soldier sang it, so did everybody. It went all over Siberia. It was the song of a people's soul.

At Irkutsk Kolchak's cabinet resigned and the Social Revolutionaries, assuming power, ordered the dictator's arrest. When General Syrovy learned Kolchak's bodyguard had permitted the carrying-out of the order he was furious. He demanded Kolchak's release, but was refused.

Had General Janin, Allied commander in chief, or the members of the Allied High Command then at Irkutsk, supported him, Syrovy might have forced Kolchak's release. As it was, Kolchak was tried on counts of having illegally seized dictatorship, and on February seventh at Verdjni Udinsk he was shot by a firing-squad.

Our Siberian Odyssey was drawing to its close. There remained now only the extrication of our rear guard. Syrovy desired to get away without any more fighting. But after all the blows we had dealt them the Bolsheviks smarted for revenge and threatened to engulf us.

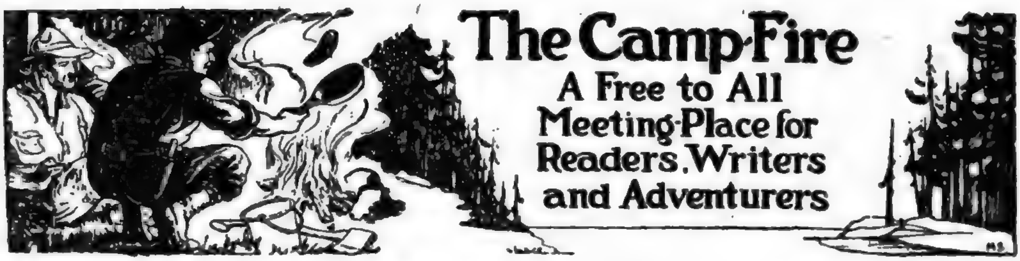
Syrovy now played his trump. He possessed a considerable portion of the Kolchak treasure, which had been given him for safe-keeping. This he threatened to keep unless the Bolsheviks agreed to permit our departure unmolested. In that case, he would agree to hand over the treasure to the proper authorities at Vladivostok. So the agreement was made and kept.

Ataman Semenov, however, was disgusted that we should withdraw and leave no buffer between him and the Bolsheviks, and attempted to bar our way. But after a sharp brush between several of our echelons and a force of his choice cutthroats—Siberians, Cossacks, Buriats, Tatars, Mongols and German and Magyar renegades—under his captain, Skipetrov, a brush in which Skipetrov was utterly put to rout, we were allowed to proceed.

At length we reached the Promised Land of Vladivostok. I had been many months in the city, and the edge of anticipation was dulled for me.

But when my comrades of the rear guard passed the encircling hills in March of 1920, where the snow still lay in great irregular patches, when they saw the steep streets, the comfortable houses, the wide roadstead, they were like crazy men. All they could do during the days when we waited for ships to bear us across the Pacific to Vancouver, thence to cross Canada and take ship again at Quebec for the last leg of our journey home, was to come down to the waterfront and stand there by the hour.

And there they would stand, staring past the Allied warships and the merchant vessels riding at anchor, staring out across the blue waters of the bay as if their eyes could pierce to Prague and home. Home! Free land of free men after the greatest Odyssey of all time.



The Camp-Fire

A Free to All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

IN connection with his article in this issue on the Czechoslovak march across Asia a few words from Gerald B. Breitigam:

> There isn't an incident, a date or a name, other than those of the narrator and his few personal friends, that is not authenticated. The episode of the trip to Moscow by a few Czech officers, traveling as Bolsheviks, and their salvaging of the 3,000,000 roubles belonging to the Czech army, is true as to dates and figures. The capture of the Baikal tunnels, of Mysowa or Murma, the battles on the lake between the Bolshevik and Czech gunboats, and, in fact, every incident and episode—true.
>
> I strove not for an air of artificial romance, but to depict the narrator and all his companions in what I believe, from some association with them, to be their true light. They are imaginative, characterful men, with a deep sense of duty and a strong sense of right. I have tried to keep them human and simple in my portrayals.—GERALD B. BREITIGAM.

It seems strange, even allowing for the stupendous turmoil of the Great War, that, with the exception of Mr. Breitigam's correspondence for two newspapers, there has not hitherto been published in this country any rounded-out account of that wonderful Czechoslovak march across the continent of Asia. It is the modern anabasis, by ten times ten thousand, over a many times greater distance than was marched and fought by the veterans of Xenophon. Yet, if Americans have heard of it at all, only the bare event is known to them. With the world in struggle on the battlefields of Europe scant attention was given by the press to the more remote event; and even when a detachment of the returning veterans crossed Canada on their around-the-world trip to France they won only scant and fleeting attention.

If that fighting march across Siberia had been made at a time when the world was not engrossed in other matters the sheer and stupendous drama of the thing would have held its daily columns in the newspapers, set the people agog with interest and registered itself as one of the most spectacular events in history. As it is, we have hardly even heard of it.

I am glad it is given *Adventure* to present what so far as I know is the first complete story in the English language of that heroic and almost unbelievable march. The account, as its author says, is a simple one unadorned. There is sufficient drama in the bare facts themselves.

The world owes a salute of honest admiration to those Czechoslovaks who so simply and quietly performed the heroic and accomplished the impossible.

BY THE time this reaches you there will probably be on our building a memorial tablet erected by the Greenwich Village Historical Society to commemorate a famous house long since vanished. The following is from a New York paper:

> The famous Richmond Hill Mansion, once the headquarters of General George Washington, is no longer standing, its approximate site being occupied by the Butterick Building. From the high position it occupied in 1776 as the headquarters of the Commanding General of the American forces in the Revolution, the mansion ultimately deteriorated into headquarters for a menagerie, shortly before its razing in 1849. The romantic story of its rise and fall is told as follows by Mrs. Clivette:
>
> "RICHMOND HILL MANSION was the famous patriotic American house of romance, politics, diplomacy and the arts, erected in 1760 by Abraham Mortimer on a tract of land acquired from Trinity Church Corporation. There is no record of his purchasing the land outright, so a long lease probably was granted him.
>
> "Mortimer was a person of importance, for in those days his Majesty's forces had right of way in all things social as well as governmental, and Mortimer at one time was a commissary of the English Army. No doubt he was English, and probably named the property Richmond Hill to remind him of England. He was a man of wealth and position, and invested a goodly part of his fortune in Richmond Hill Mansion. It was through his elaborate entertainments that the house first established its reputation for hospitality.
>
> "Its approximate locality is today squared by Macdougal, Spring, Varick and Charlton Streets,

12

and the entrance through the massive art iron gates which Aaron Burr installed, greatly to the chagrin of Abigail Adams, would be about at the front of the Butterick Building on Macdougal and Spring Streets.

"A FRIEND of Major Mortimer and a visitor to Richmond Hill was Sir Jeffrey Amherst, afterward Lord Amherst, who made Mortimer's home his headquarters at the close of the campaign waged against French power in America.

"On April 13, 1776, General Washington, on his return from Boston, made the Hill his headquarters. At this time the house was the scene of some of the most stirring conferences which marked the beginning of the Revolution. After Washington moved his headquarters, a period of mystery enveloped Richmond Hill. During the struggle and before the formal evacuation of New York by the British, Richmond Hill house is thought to have been occupied by British soldiers. Lord Dorchester, Sir Guy Carlton and other English noblemen were dwellers under its roof during the Revolution.

"IN 1789 John Adams and his wife Abigail came to live at the Hill. Verplanck, whose *nom de plume* was Francis Herbert, wrote in 1829 his personal reminiscences, including the account of a dinner party given by Vice-President and Mrs. Adams, which acquaints us with the names of many notables who enjoyed the generous hospitality dealt out at Richmond Hill.

"On this particular occasion were present Baron Steuben, Thomas Jefferson, Count du Moustier, the French Ambassador; the dignified Mr. Van Birket, learned and able envoy from Holland; Chancellor Livingston, who administered the oath of office to George Washington, and members of Congress.

"In 1797 Richmond Hill passed to the possession of a rich foreigner, Temple by name, of whom little is known. That little is to the effect that he was robbed of large sums of money during the short time he resided there, and that he disappeared the same year in which he arrived.

"HE WAS followed by Aaron Burr, whose fourteen-year-old daughter Theodosia became mistress of the house, her mother having died a few years previously. Burr entertained as lavishly as Mortimer and Adams, and many notables again enjoyed the hospitality of Richmond Hill Mansion.

"When Aaron Burr left this country after his duel with Alexander Hamilton, Richmond Hill house was sold to John Jacob Astor for $25,000. Counselor Egbert Benson, first Attorney General of the State of New York and first President of the New York Historical Society, is thought to have been the last well-known person who resided in the famous house. He entertained persons of many nationalities. Verplanck has recorded that he dined at the house one time with thirteen others, all of whom spoke different languages.

"THE house passed to some art lovers in 1831 who attempted to establish a high-class theater for the expression of the arts. A prize offered for the best poetical address at the opening was won by Fitz-Greene Halleck. The art-loving group spent the little money they possessed on their venture, which was not a success.

"After the house had served as an inn or road house it became in 1842 the shelter for a circus, and later headquarters for a menagerie. In 1849 Richmond Hill Mansion passed away, leaving memories of romance too sacred to our nation to be lost. It is to perpetuate them that the memorial tablet will be erected."

GO TO it, all you who do know Saskatchewan! Here's one of our writers' brigade who admits he wrote a story laid there without ever having been nearer than Duluth. He's fair game, so go after him. As you know, *Adventure's* aim is to print only stories by writers who know their material at first-hand. Here's a man bold enough to try material at long range, and honest enough to state his case flatly. Remember his honesty in his favor, but hold him to the right accomplishment of what he undertook.

Anyhow, it's sort of an interesting story, isn't it?

It's his first in our magazine, so Christopher Hawthorne follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

About two months ago you took kindly to a short tale of mine, "The Third Posse," and since that time I have become an invisible hanger-on at the Camp-Fire. Some of these birds who write to you are obviously professors of the out-doors. My lot has been cast in different lines. As an interne in a newspaper office for several years the nearest approach to an adventure I have had recently was when I was jerked overboard at my end of a bluefish line just out of Jamaica Bay. That was last Summer. Yesterday I stepped on a sand-crab down at Plum Island and called it a day's thrill.

FOR all that, "The Third Posse" is an authentic yarn in its essence. One morning last Winter I mooched across the thousand-acre, snow-covered desolation of the abandoned Sheepshead Bay race-track. I am a left-handed man—also left-legged. Another fellow, minding his own business, started across at the same time. Our trails made an ellipse. Presto! There's your yarn. If the Sheepshead Bay race-track had been a hundred-thousand-acre tract instead of a thousand acres, what would have happened? Traveling in opposite directions, we'd meet again, wouldn't we?

So it happens that I'm tossing an artificial log into the Camp-Fire. I've never been nearer Saskatchewan than Duluth. I faked my atmosphere. There ought to be a law against a man writing a story about a country he has never seen. But what are you going to do about it? Only the other night I had a long talk with Russell Hastings Millward, a big-game hunter—some of you know him, no doubt—and he tells me he can't write a lick. Yet he tells a story that grips you with its truth and brevity.

I'm going out today in a fifty-foot yawl. Maybe we'll catch two sharks and tie their tails together or something like that. The fellow sitting at my elbow says he did it last July right ferninst Atlantic Highlands. A —— liar, I calls him!—Chris. Hawthorne.

WE GLADLY publish the following from the editor of the Burlingon, Vermont, *Daily News*, with sincere regret if anything in *Adventure* has cast an unmerited aspersion upon a good patriot:

Burlington, Vermont, May 21, 1923.

There has but lately come to my attention an article in *Adventure* for June dealing with Ethan Allen, by Lewis Appleton Barker. I am taking the liberty of calling this to your attention because of certain statements that are not borne out by history and which, if published, would create a wrong impression concerning the fame of Ira Allen, a stanch patriot and founder of the University of Vermont.

IT IS declared by Mr. Barker that Ira, Captain Ethan Allen's younger brother, "at the start of the Revolution, siding with the Crown, went to Canada." Ira Allen never sided with the Crown. During the Haldimand negotiations, Ira Allen was active on behalf of the American revolutionists and, the situation being desperate, he was obliged to use desperate means. These were such as to cause those who were not on the inside to suspect that Ira was siding with the British, but evidence shows that he was merely crafty and was pulling the wool over the eyes of the Crown. This evidence is borne out time and again by subsequent developments.

It is my belief that Mr. Barker has confused Ira Allen with another brother, Levi Allen, who at one time, especially when Ethan was a captive in the hands of the British, was devoted to the captor of Ticonderoga. Following Ethan's release, Ethan complained, under date of January 9, 1779, when he was at Arlington, Vermont, asking that Levi's property be confiscated on the ground that he was a Tory. Reference is made to this in Crockett's History of Vermont, Vol. II, Page 251, line 28.

MR. BARKER also says that Ira at one time challenged Ethan to a duel. There is no evidence, so far as known, that will bear out this statement. The story has appeared in some old records of such a challenge being made by Levi, but has not been well authenticated, I believe.

It is only in the spirit of endeavor to correct what might lead to a wrong impression that I am writing to you of this matter. Ira Allen's patriotism has never, so far as I am aware, been questioned; and the publication of Mr. Barker's article would cast aspersions on a name which has ever held a high place in the thoughts of Vermonters.

Please accept this correction in the spirit in which it is sent and believe me to be

Yours very truly, Louis Fenner Dow.

Mr. Barker's reply to the above letter follows:

Brookline, Mass.

If you read the entire article, you will note that I gave considerable credit to General Ira, saying:

"The fame of Ethan Allen, the sturdy leader of the Green Mountain Boys and captor of Ticonderoga, is so great that it has overshadowed that of his younger brother, Ira, whose services in the early days of the Republic entitled him to remembrance apart from his more celebrated relative. . . .

"He was a member of the First Constitutional Convention of Vermont, and its first Secretary of State. In turn he occupied the offices of Treasurer, Member of the Council, Surveyor General, and Major General of Militia, in which latter capacity he went to Europe in 1795 to purchase a supply of arms for Vermont."

IT IS needless for me to say that there was no intention to detract from the virtues of a sturdy patriot. I did not confuse Ira with the other brother, Levi Allen. If such confusion has been made it must be attributed to Benson J. Lossing. I am very frank to confess that I depend chiefly for my authority on a note at the foot of Page 161 of Lossing's "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution." Of course, I am aware that Ira Allen's activities during the Haldimand negotiations have been subject to different interpretations by different people. However, I have never, personally, doubted the purity of his motives at that time. That such difference of opinion has existed seems to be recognized in your letter.

Obviously, in so brief an article, and not in a historical magazine or write-up, one does not go to the length of citing all authorities.

As a rule, I think that Lossing is as much to be depended upon as any writer that I know of, concerning the American Revolution. He did what practically no other historian has done. He went personally over the ground, at a time when it was possible to talk with persons who could actually remember the events of the Revolution, and probably wrote the most painstaking and detailed book that has ever been written on the subject.—Lewis Appleton Barker.

THIS newspaper article was sent in by Joe W. Lister and Captain Bruce Q. Nabers. Perhaps by still others, but am writing this away from our cache. Comrade Nabers does not commit himself on the article but says, "At any rate he is the first cavalryman I ever heard refer to his outfit as a 'company' instead of 'troop' and 'battalion' instead of 'squadron.' The opening of the interview with Captain John Ryan of West Newton, Mass., by John T. Brady, is omitted:

"You were with Custer then?" I said.

"For ten years," he replied. "I was one of his first sergeants at the time he was slain."

"Then you know the real story of that fight?" I asked.

"Better than it has ever been told, even in the war records at Washington, I claim," he replied. "But I've refrained from giving it to the newspapers because of the bother 'twould cause me of answering a lot of letters about it.

"This being the anniversary of the battle, however, I suppose I must give you the story, and you can rest assured it has never been published in New England.

"FIRST, I must tell you a little about my service in the Civil War. I was severely wounded five times in that conflict, particularly on the 25th of August, 1864, while repulsing a Confederate charge at the battle of Reams' Station, on the Weldon Railroad, Virginia, it being my nineteenth birthday.

"I received three wounds in probably the same number of minutes, on the left side of the neck, left thigh and left instep, so quickly that I did not have an opportunity to thank the donors, but somehow I survived.

"On Nov. 22, 1866, the Army fever struck me again, and I enlisted at Boston, Mass., for five years and was assigned to Troop M, Seventh United States Cavalry, then being organized at Fort Riley, Kansas, under General Custer's supervision, he being then lieutenant-colonel of the regiment. I served out my enlistment and then reenlisted, but to make a long story short, I'll pass over the events of the years up to 1876.

"THAT Spring an expedition was organized at Fort A. Lincoln, to go against the Indians, under command of General Alfred Terry, who commanded the Department of Dakota.

"The morning of the 17th of May we prepared to make a move. In marching through the fort first came the scouts under command of Lieutenant Varnum, with Head Chief Bloody Knife and Charlie Reynolds and Fred Girard, two white scouts, and Izar Dorman, the negro interpreter from Fort Rice.

"Then came General Custer and his staff, at the head of the Seventh Cavalry band, all mounted on their magnificent gray horses, playing one of Custer's favorite battle tunes, "Garryowen." Next came the Seventh Cavalry, all wearing broad-rimmed slouch hats, some black and some gray.

"IT APPEARS that General Custer and some of the scouts had gone ahead and got some information of the location of the Indian camp, for here he split the regiment into three battalions.

"About fifty pack mules constituted the pack train which followed Custer's trail and later joined Reno's battalion on the bluffs, which was very fortunate, as we almost ran out of ammunition.

"We then rode over the divide and moved down through a small valley and around the foot of a bluff. We saw a few abandoned lodges, with the fronts of them tied up, and I think Custer had made preparations to charge that camp, thinking it was an Indian camp.

"When we got as far as that we could see objects ahead of us down the little valley, but could not tell whether they were Indians or buffalo.

"IT WAS at this point, I understand, that Custer gave the command to Reno to overtake those Indians, and he would support him, although I did not hear that order given myself.

"This was the last we saw of Custer's battalion until we found their bodies on the morning of the 27th. Custer took his battalion and branched off to the right. "Major Marcus A. Reno's battalion followed the valley right down to the Little Big Horn River, and Benteen branched off to the left. We started down the valley first at a trot and then at a gallop, riding in columns of twos.

"Lieutenant Varnum, a very brave young officer in command of the scouts, rode ahead of Reno's division, swinging his hat in the air and shouting, 'Thirty days' furlough to the man who gets the first scalp.'

"WE ARRIVED at the bank of the Little Big Horn River and waded to the other side, where there was quicksand and a very strong current. On the other side of the river we made a short halt, tightened our girths, and then swung into our saddles.

"We were then in the valley of the Little Big Horn, and facing down-stream. We started down on a trot and then a slow gallop.

"Captain French gave me orders to take ten men off to the right of my company and form a skirmish line, so as to cover the brush from the right of our line to the river bank in case the Indians might be lurking there. We advanced in that formation and it was as commander of that detachment that I fired the first shot of the battle.

"We got the skirmish line formed, and here the Indians made their first charge. There were probably five hundred of them coming from the direction of their village. They were well mounted and well armed, and they tried to cut through our skirmish line, but we fired volleys into them, repulsing their charge, and emptying a number of saddles.

"FINALLY, when they could not cut through us, they strung out in single file, lying on the opposite side of their ponies from us, and then they commenced to circle. They overlapped our skirmish line on the left and were closing in on our rear to complete the circle, when we got orders to fall back to our horses.

"We got back to our horses and the orders were given to mount. At this point some of the men became confused and could not find their horses. Major Reno had lost his hat and had a red handkerchief tied around his head.

"By this time they had us surrounded, and were on higher ground than we were. Major Reno rode up and said, 'Any of you men who wish to make your escape, follow me.'

"THE order was then given to charge, and away we went up the steep embankment, cutting through the Indians in a solid body, Major Reno in the lead. As we cut through the fighting was hand to hand, and it was death to any man who fell from his horse, or was wounded and not able to keep up with the command.

"In my opinion if Reno had remained in the timber a short time longer, not a man would have made his escape as the Indians outnumbered us ten to one.

"After we had crossed the river and regained the bluffs we could look back on the plains where the Indians were and could see them stripping, scalping and mutilating the bodies of our fallen comrades.

"Soon after the firing ceased, and shortly we were joined by Benteen's battalion, which was the first we had seen of him since the division of the regiment. Later the pack train arrived and leaving two companies to guard it and the wounded, Major Reno, with five companies, or what was left of them, proceeded in the direction we had supposed General Custer took.

"When dark set in, it closed the engagement on the 25th. The Indians renewed the fight again on the 26th, but late in the day their firing slackened. That night everything was quiet, and next morning at daylight, on looking over the bluffs to where the Indians' camp was, we saw it was deserted.

"I WAS in the detail that helped bury the dead of my own battalion, under Major Reno's command, and then proceeded to the Custer battlefield and helped to bury forty-five of General Custer's 211 men that were killed with him. Amongst them was General Custer, his brother, Captain Thomas Custer, and Lieutenant William W. Cooke, adjutant of the regiment, and two other officers.

"General Custer was not scalped. He had two bullet wounds, one through his head, from one side to the other, another through his body. We found those bodies on a little gravelly knoll surrounded by quite a few bodies of other men. We dug a grave and put his body in it.

"We then found another body, so terribly mutilated that we could not identify it. I knew that Captain Custer had 'T. W. C.' marked on his arm with India ink, because I was more or less familiar with him in camp, as he was first lieutenant of my troop for four years before he was made captain of C troop.

"We examined the mutilated body thoroughly, and we found the letters 'T. W. C.' and that settled it. We then laid him beside the general, in the same grave.

"We next found the body of Lieutenant Cooke. He had long, black side whiskers, but was rather bald, so the Indians cut off one of his side-whiskers for a scalp.

"GOING out into this engagement General Custer wore a broad-brimmed slouch hat, buckskin shirt and trousers and high top cavalry boots. He was armed with a Remington sporting rifle which used a brass shell. He also carried in his belt two pistols, one a 45 caliber Colt, and the other a French navy, and a hunting knife. He rode that day a large sorrel horse, his favorite mount, 'Dandy,' being with the pack train."

After Sergeant Ryan was honorably discharged from the Army with commendations for his bravery, he returned to his old home in Newton Mass., where he was born, Aug. 25, 1845. He became a policeman in Newton, and rose to the rank of captain, which commission he held until his retirement in 1913. He is a past commander of Charles Ward Post, No. 62, G. A. R., of Newton.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Sidney Herschel Small rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. I know the general feeling among you toward missionaries but have no qualms over introducing you to the fighting specimen in this story. You'll meet him again in other adventures.

Just about thirty years before Sandburg wrote "Slabs of the Sunburnt West" I was added to the count. Change the first "a" to "o", take off the second "s", shove the word "native" in ahead, and there we are. My people came across the plains just behind the ill-fated Donner party, which was wise, or else I wouldn't be at all.

AS A youngster the family business was in the Orient. Two years there, and a year in the States. The Philippines in the days when you drank lukewarm beer at the Chino's in Iloilo, when the *eta*-villagers in Japan didn't dare howling "Nao-o-o-sh" as *geta*-menders through the respectable streets and never thought of starting rice-riots, when the Chinese believed that the hair of a dog could become Lord knows what—as they still do, more or less. And out of that how was a sober, respectable citizen to be formed, voting for school-bonds or caring a hang if new electroliers were put on Main Street? It isn't done.

It was tried. Wisconsin ex-1914, ex-stockclerk, ex-salesman, ex-advertising manager. And so we live on the side of a hill in a small California town, where the two youngsters play in a cañon filled with iris and columbine and mission-bell, or on a hillside covered with scrub oak and madrone. Even the three-year-old can do his couple of miles over a mountain trail, and the Boston pup is deluded into thinking he's a deer-hound. Is it the life? I'll say it is—so much so that all of the slang I use is as old as that! But just as soon as the youngsters are out of the milk age we'll find the old trails again.

BEING of a frugal nature I married a graduate nurse: this saves doctor bills with the babes. Together we've seen a bit and done a bit. We almost located a claim in Wyoming, on a piece of creek-bottom (dry) where we discovered a glorious spring. Only it was a school-section. If it hadn't been for that I might have been guardian for a bunch of steers. No, guess I'd been ex- at that too.

So for a while we are going to do our adventuring out of books and maps. We say, "Wait until—" and "As soon as the babies—" But it isn't so hard to wait, and where, I ask, can you find on the road a tub filled with hot water, and a fuzzy thick towel? Except Japan, if you can stand parboiling.—SIDNEY HERSHEL SMALL.

THE following was sent to me by H. Bedford-Jones to give me a "private laugh;" but there was enclosed the actual clipping from Maggs Bros., catalog offering the "Epitome" in question, just to show that his "josh" had some foundation. For the matter of that I remember reading somewhere years ago, when delving into the ancient history of Ireland, a statement that the Japanese were originally Irish—or maybe it was that the Irish were originally Japanese. From the following it now seems that both of them were originally Jews! Right here I want to make a special request of representatives of all three races that they do not personally assault H. Bedford-Jones or myself, but that they accept the fact that from first to last nothing is intended but a grin—a grin at the eccentricities of historical theories, not at any of the races concerned.

Just the same, historical theories are to

many of us just as interesting as the clues and theories in a detective case. And it isn't always easy to say just which historical theories are the absurd ones.

I am regretfully compelled to prove that your Camp-Fire theorists anent the Lost Tribes and Stone of Scone, etc., are all wrong. I recommend them first to turn to McLeod's "Illustrations to the Epitome of Ancient History of Japan," published at Kioto in 1878. There they will find actual pictures—not, mind you, mere imaginative fancies—of the following historical facts:

Conveyance of Israelitish families to Japan.

Order of march of Israelites to Japan.

Rafts used by Israelites to cross to Japan via Saghalien.

Ancient characters of Nineveh, Babylon and Media, found in Japan.

Etc., etc., eighty or more actual pictures.

It is, of course, evident to all open-minded persons that the Japanese are descended from the Lost Tribes. If the interested reader will then turn to the Strassburg edition of Geiler's "Navicula Sive Speculum Fatuorum," he will at once perceive that this magnificent pictorial and textual evidence so clearly presented can not be denied; and that beyond all question Jeremiah came to Ireland from Japan. In fact the derivation of the name Jeremiah shows this, it being identical with the Japanese Ge-re-mya, "He Gives Stones," and taken in conjunction with the many Japanese roots found in the English language, the evidence is clear to any impartial person. That the Empress Gingo Koko was descended from Jeremiah is, of course, clear; I will be very glad to furnish a genealogical chart in proof if you will publish it.—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

WORRIED a bit over local color in T. S. Stribling's novelette in this issue, we asked him about several points and received the following reply:

Clifton, Tennessee.

My Fiji tale is a lot solider than you and Cox seem to think.

THE story of the Jap is absolutely authentic. He was trying to buy Fanning Island through a priest, but I changed it to a beach-comber out of regard for your Catholic editor who cut the end of "Web of the Sun."

The priest had the thing bought and the chief justice of the Fijis had to cable London and met with precisely the obstacles I relate and eventually got a bill through Parliament at the eleventh hour and saved the island for the English. The reason the Jap didn't show himself at Suva was because of the opposition he would create to the sale, and it was only by virtue of the fact that the English judge found out that the priest was agent of Japan that he put up any objection.

The manner in which he found it out—by tracing a check, I invented. I got this tale from the chief justice of Demarara, who was the judge in the Fijis at the time of this occurrence.

I met him on the Dutch steamer *Nickerie*, *en route* from Barbados to Trinidad. I happened to be able to give him some information about his niece higher up in the islands and from this point he launched into reminiscences.

AS TO the local color, *vilavilarevo*, etc. Every word of that came out of the Encyclopædia Britannica. I didn't import a thing. And the thing I am proudest of, "Ndengei" the snake god, is correct. In fact Ndengei appeals to me strongly—a god that will crawl off and let you alone. Splendid! Splendid! I am thinking seriously about establishing a sect of Ndengeians here in the States and especially invite the Comstock Society to join. In fact, half of our reformers should become Ndengeians, and we could run canoes over the other half.

My description of Suva must be about right, for I never saw an English colonial court but what looked run down and ratty. What I really did was to use the court house in Port au Spain for Suva, for I had seen that and didn't have to go to the trouble to invent. I did invent a little park to go around it, for Port au Spain's courts are too impossibly hot to have even in fiction.

With this explanation, if you still feel you would like to change the scene to an invented country, you are welcome to, of course, but you might print extracts of this letter in Camp-Fire and get an alibi on it that way. To me the fact that I got the tale straight from the English judge is the most interesting part about it.

Only the judge's tale had nothing to do with the canoe-race, the fire-walking or the canoe-launching. It dealt strictly with the attempt to obtain the island and its frustration by cable.—T. S. S.

THOUGH not a follower of Woodrow Wilson, the following from an Associated Press dispatch based on an article of the ex-President's in the August *Atlantic Monthly* seems to me something all good Americans need to hear:

> "It was against capitalism," he declares, "that the Russian leaders directed their attack . . . and it is against capitalism under one name or another that the discontented classes everywhere draw their indictment."
>
> Everywhere, he says, there are thoughtful men who believe that capitalism is indispensable to civilization, but he does not ask, "Is the capitalistic system unimpeachable?"
>
> "Is it not true," he continues, "that capitalists have often seemed to regard the men whom they used as mere instruments of profit, whose physical and mental powers it was legitimate to exploit? . . . Ought we not to seek a way to remove such offenses and make life itself clean for those who will share honorably and cleanly in it?
>
> "But democracy has not yet made the world safe against irrational revolution. That supreme task, which is nothing less than the salvation of civilization, now faces democracy, insistent, imperative. There is no escaping it unless everything we have built up is presently to fall in ruin about us; and the United States, as the greatest of democracies, must undertake it.
>
> "The road that leads away from revolution is clearly marked, for it is defined by the nature of men and of organized society. It therefore behooves us to study very carefully and very candidly

> the exact nature of the task and the means of its accomplishment. . . . The sum of the whole matter is this, that our civilization can not survive materially unless it be redeemed spiritually. . . . Here is the final challenge to our churches, to our political organizations, and to our capitalists—to every one who fears God or loves his country."

IN OUR materialistic age business is our god. The dollar is taken more and more as the measure of a man's worth. It can not measure his worth even on a materialistic basis, for we fail to make the vital distinction between money-brains and producing brains. On any other than a materialistic basis it can not possibly be a measure of real worth, of real value to the community. Yet we try to use it as such. And as the test for public measures. Immigration, for example.

They say we need more immigrants to develop our industries. So that these industries will need still more immigrants? And what industries? In a country among whose biggest expenditures are those for candy and chewing-gum, there is need for some little inquiry as to the importance of some of our industries in comparison with the importance of whether our country hasn't had all the immigration it can stand when only a little over 55% of its total population are of white American parentage.

Redeemed spiritually? Yes. Mr. Wilson in the above does not state just how it is to be done, but an excellent beginning will be made if we Americans can begin to realize that worth and wisdom can not be measured by dollars.

REDEEMED spiritually? Yes, but that does not mean by turning to creeds for help. Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Catholic, Jew, Christian Scientist, Mohammedan and all the rest have already wasted too much of the world's time in quarreling over creeds. One says God is 40 ft. 8 in. high and 3 ft. broad; the next denies it strenuously, saying God is fully 3 ft. 2 in. broad; the next insists that He is 31 ft. high and 5 ft. broad; and all the rest argue for still other dimensions. Many of their differences of opinion are just as silly as that. The tragedy is that in disputing over the differences they too often forget the essentials of a really spiritual reaching-up by man for something higher. Spiritual redemption is not to be attained by rivalry but by fellowship. Let each man choose the details to suit himself. Perhaps the one real essential is that he shall in some sort follow the Golden Rule. I don't know. Who does?

THE wrangling of creeds has been one of the greatest obstacles to spiritual development. Atheism, naturally enough, spreads, and there can be no spiritual development along that road, nor any real progress on even a materialistic basis. Often I see a young man selling tracts and wearing a placard saying in heavy type, "Be an atheist." Well, even on a materialistis basis, suppose I do become an atheist, what do I get out of it? I can't see that the atheists I know have it any softer or get any more out of life than those who are not. "Be an atheist?" But *why?* It's sort of funny. After all, the chap with the placard is just another creedist himself, the essential of his creed being to give up trying.

Redeemed spiritually? Mr. Wilson is given to large phrases and this one is particularly large and loose, though he may have given it more exact definition in the course of his article. Yet in a way most of us know what he means and that he is right.

WE MAY differ among ourselves as to the exact interpretation. What matter? And if we argue over it we lose time and waste effort. Can't we all pretty well agree on an essential meaning and let the minor points shift for themselves? And isn't the essential that we try harder and more consistently to work for the other fellow's good a little more and for our own profit a little less? Which, being translated into terms of democracy, means working a little less for one's self and a whole lot more for the good of the people as a whole.

It would be a good start anyway.—A. S. H.

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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(See Lost Trails)

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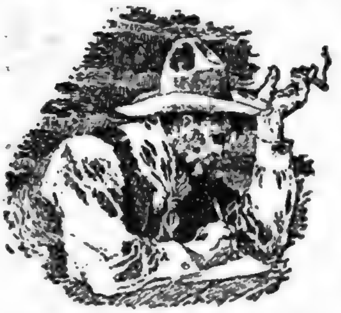
Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

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The "Courage Flower"

THE properties attributed to it are largely in the mind, according to its discoverer:

Question:—"Can you give me some more information concerning this 'courage flower' mentioned in the enclosed item clipped from a newspaper recently?

> Gordon MacCreagh, explorer, has found in the heart of South America 'the courage flower,' said to cure fear in the user.

Did you bring many specimens back with you? If so, I surely need something of this sort—I am sorry to admit—and would like a sample if possible to obtain same.

Probably if I could get out in the great out-of-doors for a long period of time and build up physically, I might secure more badly needed nerve and courage; but I am employed indoors and am rather run down physically, and I certainly do lack nerve.

Please advise me fully concerning this herb or plant, as I am greatly interested.

While I am writing you, I wish that you would also please advise as to what kind of revolver you find the most reliable and effective on your trips. In fact, what is about the best revolver obtainable in any make or caliber? Is the automatic pistol as reliable and effective and accurate as the straight six-shooter?

Four cents in stamps enclosed."— ——— ———, Nashville, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—I am sorry to have to tell you that this courage-flower thing is something of a fizzle. The clipping you enclose refers to the *caapi* plant, a mysterious and somewhat legendary thing which has been reported from time to time by explorers as being used by the Indians of the Amazon Basin to work up their courage preparatory to going into battle. But nobody had ever come in contact with any people who actually knew of the plant.

I was fortunate enough to find a tribe who knew and used the plant to give themselves courage to go through an ordeal of devil-chasing which involved severe flagellation.

The warriors went through a most amazing test of stamina and courage. But whether it was really the *caapi* that stimulated them, or whether their reaction was not largely psychological, remains a matter for conjecture. Personally I think the latter. For I drank the infusion with them and went through the whole ceremony for three days.

But I experienced no more than a certain exhilaration. I was most certainly not keyed up to a pitch of recklessness to induce me to go through the beating-up with whips; and I quit—and got well laughed at.

Samples of the drug which I brought out with me are still in the hands of chemists, who are conducting experiments with a view to finding out whether there is any useful principle in the plant. But no report is yet forthcoming.

Regarding revolvers and automatics. I hesitate to venture an opinion on so vexed a subject. I would say that my personal preference is for the Luger 9 mm. automatic pistol. Mr. D. Wiggins of "A. A." would give you dope on revolver *vs.* automatic pistol.

Swamplands of the Atlantic Seaboard

HANGOUT of snakes, mosquitoes and moonshiners:

Question:—"Would you please tell me if there are muskrats and mink in the Dismal Swamp? I read a story some years ago about two men that went trapping in the Dismal Swamp. They had a lot of sport and adventure. I would like to make such a trip, if what they told was fact."—J. H. Chamberlin, Hiram, O.

Answer, by Mr. Shannon:—There certainly is plenty of muskrat and considerable mink in the Dismal Swamp country and a trip through it would be something of an adventure for any one, although I wouldn't advise your taking it—and certainly not without a guide who knows the swamp section.

Swamplands never appealed to me from the standpoint of adventure. Snakes, mosquitoes and other pests are too plentiful.

Just now I am only a short distance from the noted Okeefinokee Swamp, where the Seminole Indians made their last stand. Lots of game and fur in its depths and fine bass-fishing, also snakes, alligators, malaria and moonshiners.

They are bad people to fool with, and I imagine that the Dismal Swamp is so infested since the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment.

The salt marshes of Virginia and Maryland are ideal trapping-places for muskrat, and they are free from such pests as I have mentioned infesting the swamps.

Likewise the country is healthy and the people darned good folks to know. In case you want other information write me, but don't go busting into Dismal Swamp or any other swamp without carefully considering its disadvantages.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Manual Labor in the Philippines

AMERICANS not wanted:

Question:—"I am taking the liberty of writing to you for some information regarding the Philippine Islands. What I would like to know is, how are the chances for a man of twenty-four to make a living in the above-mentioned country in something that does not require any capital? By that I mean, are there any firms there that I could get employment with or work of any sort that I could do? Also as I do not know any language but English, would this be any handicap?

The above questions no doubt appear vague and uncertain, but you probably understand what I am driving at."—Jack Gile, St. Louis, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Connor:—Your chances for making a living in the islands by manual labor are indeed very slim. To start with you have no trade—or at least you give me the impression that you have none—and to get into the hard labor with the native would not earn enough to pay for your salt. It can not be done. And again when you work with natives unless you are in authority you lose caste.

I have recently received authentic information to the effect that Americans are not wanted—especially in the working line. Filipinos are clamoring for independence and are not overanxious to have even commercial enterprises until something has come of their plans.

I trust I have given you the information you desire; and as one who has sweltered in the tropic heat, I hope you will look before you leap, because it is no bed of roses to be left in a foreign country without employment. It is no joke at all! Thank you.

Dagger Pistols

OR PISTOL daggers, as you prefer:

Question:—"On the inside of this sheet you will find a tracing as accurately as I could make of an old pistol. I found it while in France in an old shell-torn house. It is an old cap-ball type. The grip is so small and straight that it would be an utter impossibility to grasp the grip fully in the hand and bring the muzzle down low enough to aim it.

There are threads on the end of the barrel which apparently must be used to screw on an additional barrel. The hammer sets over to the right to allow room enough to use the rear sight, although I can't see how a person could use it.

I would like to know the date and use of such a firearm. In fact any information regarding it would be greatly appreciated as I am very much interested in any weapon of past days."—RAYMOND L. CARLETON, Great Bend, Kans.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—I shall be very glad to tell you all about the pistol—or rather part of an altered pistol—that you found in France. Enclosed you will find some pen-and-ink drawings of two of my pistols. Your pistol was originally similar to No. 1, which is the usual type of pocket flintlock pistol made in England and France from 1750 to 1825.

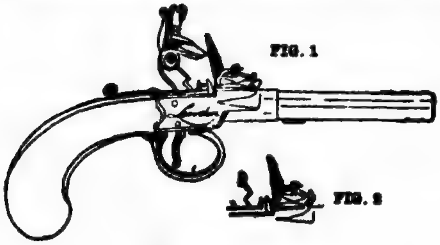


FIG. 1

FIG. 2

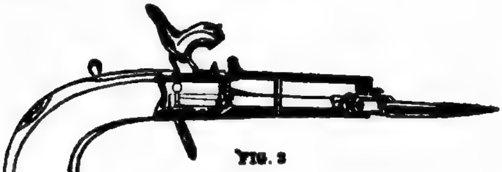


FIG. 3

FIG. 4

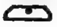
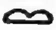


FIG. 5



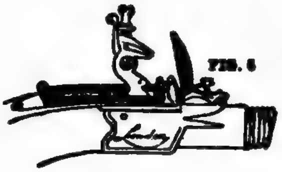


FIG. 6

To avoid the carriage of a ramrod on so small a pistol the barrel unscrewed at the breech, the powder was placed in what was left of the barrel, the ball placed on top of it as you place an egg in a cup, and the rest of the barrel screwed back on. This was handy for cleaning.

As it sometimes got stuck, through rust or otherwise, so that it was difficult to unscrew, some of them had a little lug under the barrel, as you will observe in No. 1, and with it came a ringed wrench with a slot in it to fit over the lug and thus give a purchase for unscrewing. Others, as had to be the case with No. 3, on account of the dagger, where such a wrench could not be used, had grooves or notches running in half an inch from the end of the barrel, into which a key or tool fitted, for the same purpose. These notches are frequently mistaken for rifling and so described, even by dealers. Of course it is easily seen which they are, as these would extend but half an inch, and rifling would go the entire length of the barrel.

The half-cock was originally a safety, and the hammer could not be moved from there by pressure of the trigger. There is a main spring back of the hammer, and the hammer is notched in the back so that at full cock pressure on the trigger will release it and let it fall, and at half-cock, not. Use in this case has so worn the notches in the front of the hammer, where the trigger holds it at half-cock, that it slips by on pressure.

You see this is just the opposite arrangement to the old side-hammer flintlocks, as with them the main spring was in front of the hammer and fitted over a dog or tumbler connected with the hammer, this tumbler being notched twice in the back, where the sear and sear spring were, taking the place of the trigger spring in front of the hammer in yours.

Now when, along about 1825, the percussion cap, the invention originally in 1807 of a Scotch clergyman named Forsyth, began to come into use, a lot of them were altered, as is the case with yours and with No. 3—which is a beautiful little piece of work by the famous London maker, Nock—by removing the frizzen—or battery that the flint strikes—cutting away the flash-pan and adding a percussion-cap nipple.

It is not surprizing that you were puzzled at what you took to be a rear sight. You would have been more so if you had had the rest of the barrel, for then you would have figured that there was a rear sight and no front sight.

The explanation is this. That is not a sight at all.

What you took for a sight was originally a raised shield, as in No. 4, with a hole in it. It may still be so, or it may be altered like No. 5. Originally when it was a flintlock there was a little frame—see side view in No. 1, and whole thing in No. 6—which was solid behind the hammer, then split to go each side of the hammer, then rose up in front of it and had on the raised end a little pin that pointed forward.

This performed two purposes. When at half-cock it was pushed forward, the solid part behind sliding over the back of the hammer and holding it more safely so that it could neither be fully cocked nor fired. The little pin went through the hole in what you thought was a sight and into a little hole in the bottom of the back of the frizzen, thus holding that tightly down over the pan so the powder could not escape.

When it was altered, as it did neither harm nor good, they did not take the trouble to file it away, and frequently the alteration is so good a job that it is the only way we can be sure it was originally a flintlock. That is particularly true of my Nock pistol (No. 3) which was and is a very beautiful pistol, as you may see, having a concealed trigger that folds up into the frame and drops down when it is cocked, and a little spring dagger on the side of the barrel which folds back and is caught along the side, as you may also see, to be released by sliding back a little thing on the side that covers its point and holds it back. You can imagine a man's surprize when, after it is fired and he approaches, this dagger suddenly springs out at him.

These were quite common in the finer pistols of that time.

Imports and Exports of New Guinea

BÊCHE-DE-MER is the dried flesh of a sea-slug called the trepang, regarded as a dainty in China:

Question:—"Will you kindly give me some information regarding New Guinea.

What are the main exports and imports of New Guinea, and what are some of the largest seaports?

What is the average temperature there? And during what part of the year do the rainy seasons come on, and how long do they last?

I am by trade an electrician and am at present in service of the Coast Guard as a wireless operator. Do you think it would be very difficult to find employment there?

What would be the cheapest way to get there?

Do you think I would be able to work my way on some ship as a seaman? If so would I require any passports upon arriving in New Guinea that way?"—J. C. KEPHART, U. S. S. *Modoc*.

Answer, by Mr. Armit:—Before anything else I must mention that New Guinea is divided into three separate colonies—Dutch New Guinea, Territory of New Guinea, and Territory of Papua. I regret that I am unable to furnish figures of trade, etc., of the Dutch colony. The other two colonies are appended:

Territory of Papua

This is owned by Australia. The main exports for the year ended June 30, 1922:

Bêche-de-mer	104 tons	$ 75,000
Copra (dried coconut)	5,063 tons	437,000
Copper ore	2,700 tons	67,000
Gold	51,926 ozs.	344,000
Hemp	144 tons	23,000
Pearls	7,120 carats	26,000
Rubber	85 tons	30,000
Sandalwood	18 tons	3,000
Trochus shell	170 tons	20,000
Osmiridium	56 ozs.	5,000
Gum	84 tons	8,000
Mangrove bark	86 tons	4,000

Main imports for the same period:

Ales, spirits and beverages	$ 55,000
Tobacco and manufactures thereof	133,000
Agricultural products and groceries	401,000
Textiles, pelts, furs	135,000
Metals and machinery	130,000
Oils, paints and varnishes	57,000
Drugs and chemicals	30,000
Miscellaneous	150,000
Government stores	415,000

The ports of entry for oversea vessels are Port Moresby, Samarai, and Daru. The average daily temperature at 9 A.M. is 82 F. The rains commence with the northwest monsoon about December and continue until April. Average rainfall ranges from 38 inches around the capital—Port Moresby—to 230 inches at Kikori in the Delta Division. The northwest season is the hottest and is the time when mosquitoes are most numerous, which means that it is the unhealthy part of the year. Mosquitoes mean malaria—the Curse of the Tropics.

Territory of New Guinea

This is the territory administered by Australia under a mandate from the League of Nations; it was formerly owned by Germany. The figures given are for the year ended June 30, 1920.

IMPORTS

Groceries	$950,000
Boots and drapery	380,000
Hardware and machinery	320,000
Tobacco and cigars	220,000
Wines, spirits, beer	155,000
Drugs	27,000
Oils and kerosene	120,000
Miscellaneous	340,000

EXPORTS

Copra	$3,725,000
Shell	260,000
Cocoa	77,000
Rubber	5,000
Bêche-de-mer	4,000
Ivory nuts	1,000
Birds of Paradise	170,500
Turtle shell	3,000

The principal ports are Rabaul, Kaewieng and Madang. The climate is similar to that of the Territory of Papua, but being closer to the Line it is more sultry.

New Guinea Generally

It is very difficult to obtain employment in New Guinea. The local supply of experienced men is always in excess of the demand.

Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Limited operate the wireless stations in the two Australian-controlled territories; this company's address is Wireless House, 97 Clarence St., Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

The cheapest way to reach New Guinea—I refer to your special knowledge as a radio man—is to work your passage as radio operator on a steamer to Sydney, Australia, thence on by Burns Philp steamer to Rabaul or Port Moresby. The steamer fare Sydney to Moresby is $77; Sydney to Rabaul $95. The voyage from Sydney to New Guinea takes nine days.

But why leave your own country? New Guinea is not a health resort, and jobs are few and far between here. Better stick to what you have than go after uncertainties thousands of miles away; moreover the old saw says, "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

All travelers to New Guinea from countries other than Australia must carry passports.

Sorry I can not write more hopefully.

Homesteading in Saskatchewan

GOOD land is open still; and there are also possibilities in Winter trapping:

Question:—"I am thinking about settling in Canada; also I am going to trap for a living, and I would like you to give some information about the country. Please Send all particulars about homesteading.

I would like to build a cabin near a lake in some out-of-the-way place, where there is plenty of timber where I could trap and hunt. What animals are the most plentiful; what caliber rifle, etc.? Would I need any restrictions about building a cabin? Can you get there in a flivver? Know of any route? Any other information on the country will be appreciated."—Stanley E. David, Youngstown, O.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—Write to the Land Office, Prince Albert, Sask., and they will send you information regarding the land available for homesteading in that district, also copy of Canadian homesteading regulations. The entry fee for 160 acres is ten dollars, but a man needs a few hundred dollars to start up with.

The land is heavily timbered, but eminently suited for grain-growing. You can build a log cabin and trap during the Winter time. The principal fur-bearers include muskrat, mink, marten, weasel, foxes and wolverene. .25-3,000 is a good rifle.

You can get to Prince Albert by flivver and in to your homestead by horses.

Stock-Raising in British East Africa

"*HAMBA gaghle*" (hasten slowly) as the Matabele say:

Question:—"I am writing for information on British East Africa.

How is that country as a stock country?

How cheap can I get land there?

How is it as a mining country?

Is it fairly healthy?

How far is it to their nearest market?"—Ray McBeth, Campbell River, B. C., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—B. E. A. is fine country for stock, which during the last decade has gone ahead enormously, particularly with imported stock for breeding.

Price of land naturally varies enormously from near the rail to the utter wilds. I can't pretend to give you a reliable idea. Write to the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture at Niarobi and ask for information, also for Kenya Colony (late German East).

Mining doesn't come in my list.

Yes, splendidly healthy in the uplands.

Nearest market South Africa and Europe.

Fruit-farming is another flourishing industry; also tobacco, fiber and pig-breeding. But don't plunge on any account until you've been there to see for yourself. Recollect the fellow in the country has a —— of a lot over you from his knowledge of language and local customs, etc.

The Lost Adams Diggings

ONE version of the story out of many:

Question:—"While perusing some old copies of *Adventure* this afternoon, I chanced to find a contribution from you which I found quite interesting and also to my way of thinking, as I am an old-time prospector and never found it necessary to tote a six-shooter; yet every partner I have had to date has carried arms for 'protection,' and every tenderfoot I have ever invited to spend his vacation with me in the mountains of Colorado has first inquired as to the size of cartridges needed.

I expect to make a final search for the Teal deposit—known to the average person as the Peg Leg Smith black-gold deposit—having secured reliable data from a party who saw Teal dry-washing his gold and whom Teal ordered off his ground. Now both Teal and this old party are dead, and the old workings are covered up.

I have found six lost lodes in Colorado and Utah, but they were all tenderfoot discoveries and were of no market value. Much heavy black gold has been removed by Indians and white outlaws like Peg Leg from this deposit of old man Teal, who himself cleaned up $500,000 and only scratched the top.

What I want to ask you, Mr. Robinson, is this: Can you write me any reliable data as to the 'Lost Adams diggings' of northwestern New Mexico? Has it been found by the well-organized and financed parties who have put in last Summer searching for it? Where are the diggings located? Please reply through enclosed stamped envelop."—J. W. Davies, Calexico, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Robinson:—I have heard of such an outfit taking to the field this year, but as I understand it was not in search of the "lost Adams diggings" but to search for some caches of buried treasure, reputed to have been left by the old Spanish explorers of early days, and supposed to have been buried somewhere in the vicinity of Inscription Rock, or El Moro, near Zuñi. I have been unable to find out anything more regarding the party.

The story of the Adams diggings is one of the romances of the early days of New Mexico, but what proportion of the story is truth and what is fiction is hard to determine.

A wandering Indian, reputed to have been a Navaho, reached the Pima Villages in southern Arizona, near the confluence of the Gila and Salt Rivers, some time in 1857 or '58. It seems that Adams and some other adventurers were living there at the time and apparently got the confidence of the Indian, who, after dropping hints from time to time, finally told them that he knew a place where there was plenty of gold—not a place where they would have to dig for it, but where they could pick it up from the surface of the ground and from the stream bed. He volunteered to guide them to the place. Adams and his companions started under his guidance. They were well equipped with a good pack-and-saddle outfit.

Striking northeast, they evidently crossed the White Mountains and came on down the north side in the vicinity of the present town of Springerville. Pressing onward in the same general direction, they reached another crest overlooking the big valley in western New Mexico, now in Socorro and Valencia Counties, and their attention was called to two faint, blue mountain peaks, and were told that they were to go directly toward them. After another day's travel they camped for the night, and their guide directed them to fill up every canteen and other water-container, as they would have forty-five miles to travel to the next water.

They crossed this desert stretch safely and came to a place where Indians were living and cultivating fields of corn and other crops. Beyond this they could see the great lava beds of this section, and they made directly toward "the point of the *mal pais*." The present-day maps show this southern extension of the lava flow to be just over the county line into Socorro County.

Rounding the shoulder of the *mal pais*, they entered the mouth of a cañon, steep-sided, rough and with a heavy grade, which most authorities say was running to the southwest, although variations of the tale say it run southeast. In the bottom of this cañon flowed a small stream of water. They followed it up for about fourteen miles until they came to a zigzag trail climbing the side; and up this they went, coming out on the top of a wide flat mesa. The guide then showed them that instead of the two peaks they had been using as a foresight, *three* peaks could now be seen in that direction.

Still following toward the guiding peaks—the principal one of which must have been San Mateo as it was formerly called, or as it is now better known, Mount Taylor—a comparatively short distance, sometimes stated as a "short day's travel," brought them to a box cañon, into which, with some difficulty, they dropped; and at the bottom they found a stream of clear water. Being thirsty, they stooped down to drink; and in the bottom they saw, mingled with the pebbles, nuggets of gold! Hurray! They had found their El Dorado.

It would seem that they went at their work in a businesslike manner. Some of the party were detailed to build a cabin, some, probably the most excited ones, to get out the gold, and others to do the necessary work around the place. Almost immediately trouble began to show her face, for the horses of the party seemed to trespass on the grazing-ground of the Indians living in the vicinity. An agreement was quickly made with them, however, and a line drawn. To the north the Indian ponies were to range, while to the south of the line the horses and mules of the adventurers were to graze unmolested. The trouble with the Indians seemed settled.

Then other troubles came. Their provisions were running low. They had been working but a week. Their Indian guide and friend told them it was only a two-days' trip to Fort Wingate, then situated at old San Rafael, and it was decided to send in there for supplies. For protection against possible hostile Indians eleven of the party were detailed to go with all of the stock, purchase ample supplies and return.

One member of the party, a German whose name as I recollect was Schaeffer, thought that he had sufficient from his share of the gold that had already been secured; and he asked that he be allowed to leave the party and return to Arizona. This was granted, and it is told that on his return to Arizona, which he reached in safety, he bought a ranch, paying for it with some of the gold that had been his share of the seven days' digging—ten thousand dollars.

Eleven of the party left for supplies, stating that they would be back on the evening of the sixth day at latest. With provisions running low and filled with anxiety for the party, whose time was up, Adams and one of his companions climbed to the top of the mesa to a place where they could overlook the cañon down which they expected their party to return. Away in the distance they finally discovered a pack-train coming, and as it drew nearer they saw it ambushed by a band of Indians and every member of the party killed. Stunned, they turned back toward camp only to see the cabin in flames and another band of Indians butcher their companions.

There they were, between two fires, afoot and without food; but by hiding in the daytime and traveling by night, after incredible hardship the two reached Los Angeles. Adams recovered from his terrible experience, but his companion died. Adams waited nine years and then tried to find the lost diggings, but after some eighteen months' search gave it up, returned to Los Angeles and later wrote a book of his experiences.

Search has been made at intervals ever since. A man by the name of Patterson has given most of his time for forty years to the search. Another man, Shaw by name, has spent fifteen years with no result.

There is gold in the *mal pais*, for occasionally the natives, and especially sheep-herders, will bring in a nugget or two, but the wonderful diggings of the Adams party still remain undiscovered.

This is one version of the story. If we should ask half a dozen of the old-timers to tell of the lost Adams diggings we would have at least six different stories, all following in general the above one but differing in many of the important details. Who knows which one is right?

As a matter of interest I might add that within the last few weeks caves of perpetual ice have been found in this *mal pais* formation.

Hawaiian Customs

BEAUTIFUL—but, alas, fading:

Question:—"Please write me about the customs of Hawaiian Islands."—LA VERNE DOWNTAIN, Eastland, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—Many of the old Hawaiian customs are being discarded; but surf-riding and surf-canoeing are as popular today as ever they were.

Hawaiian serenaders often wander down the beaches and street, playing and singing in the inimitable Hawaiian way. Ti-leaving, or tobogganing down grassy slopes on slick leaves is another thoroughly Hawaiian custom. *Luas*, or Hawaiian feasts; and *hukilaus*, or pulling in the great fish-nets, are often arranged for the edification of the visitors.

No prettier or more touching custom may be witnessed than that of placing *leis*, or wreaths of flowers, around the necks of arriving or departing relatives and friends.

These are practically the only distinctly Hawaiian customs remaining in general use today.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

SEVERAL times recently correspondents have sent me copies of genuine old ballads as remembered from the singing of a mother or a grandmother, and have apologized for sending them, saying, "you may not like this as it is only a love song," or "this is hardly suited for your department since I doubt whether it is a song that *men* have sung," or "perhaps you don't care for English or Scotch songs." On the contrary I do care very much for them, and they are not only proper for this department but more valuable than most of the songs that appear here.

I'm not going to apologize for devoting a whole issue to old ballads. I hope that you will soon send in enough more to fill another.

MRS. O. MOBLY of Springfield, Illinois, sends in a ballad "sung many years ago by my dear old mother and grandmother." It is commonly called "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" though it is also known as "May Colvin" or "May Collin." Other versions may be found in Child: "English and Scottish Popular Ballads" under the first title.

Pretty Polly

"Go get me some of your father's gold
And some of your mother's too,
And two of the finest horses he has in his stable,
For he has ten and thirty and two."

She got him some of her father's gold
And some of her mother's too,
And two of the finest horses he had in his stable,
For he had ten and thirty and two.

Then she jumped on the noble brown,
And he on the dappled gray,
And they rode till they came to the side of the sea,
Two long hours before it was day.

"Let me help you down, my Pretty Polly;
Let me help you down," said he.
"For it's six kings' daughters I have drowned here,
And the seventh you shall be."

"Now strip yourself, my Pretty Polly;
Now strip yourself," said he;
"Your clothing is too fine and over-costly
To rot in the sands of the sea."

"You turn your back to the leaves of the trees,
And your face to the sands of the sea;
'Tis a pity such a false-hearted man as you
A naked woman should see!"

He turned his back to the leaves of the trees,
And his face to the sands of the sea;
And with all the strength that Pretty Polly had
She pushed him into the sea.

"Come, lend me your hand, my Pretty Polly;
Come, lend me your hand," said he,
And I will be your waiting-boy,
And will wait upon you night and day."

"Lie there, lie there, you false-hearted man!
Lie there, lie there," said she;
"As six kings' daughters you've drowned here,
Then the seventh you shall be!"

Then she jumped on the noble brown,
And led the dappled gray,
And rode till she came to her father's hall,
Two long hours before it was day.

Then up bespoke her Poll Parrot,
Sitting in his cage so gay,
"Why do you travel, my Pretty Polly,
So long before it is day?"

Then up bespoke her old father,
Lying in his room so gay,
"Why do you chatter, my pretty parrot,
So long before it is day?"

"The cat was around and about my cage,
And I could not get it away,
So I called unto Miss Pretty Polly
To drive the cat away."

The loss of a verse or two near the end of the story has left the present text a bit confused. When Miss Polly is discovered by the parrot, she begs the latter not to give her away, and offers a bribe of a golden cage in return for the parrot's silence. Unfortunately the father is aroused by the conversation and wants to know what the matter is. Whereupon the wise parrot produces a perfect excuse to account both for his speaking and for Polly's presence, and the father is satisfied.

MR. C. V. HOFFMAN of Pittsburg, Kansas, sends in a most interesting version of "Andrew Bardeen" which he heard sung "aboard the barque *Mary Low* in 1888 during a trip around the Horn from Portland to Queenstown." Other versions may be found in Child under the titles "Sir Andrew Barton" and "Henry Martyn." Andrew Barton was a Scottish seaman who lived in the early sixteenth century. The story is confused here by the introduction of King George III and Charles Stuart.

Andrew Bardeen

1. There were three brothers in old Scotland,
Three loving brothers were they;
They all cast lots to see who should go
A-robbing all o'er the salt sea.

2. The lot it fell on Andrew Bardeen,
He being the youngest of three,
Was forced to go robbing all o'er the salt sea
To maintain his two brothers and he.

3. He had not sailed more than a week in the year
When a ship he did espy,
Come sailing so far off and so far on
Till at last it came sailing so high.

4. "Who are you? Who are you?" cries Andrew Bardeen.
"Who are you, and where are you bound?"
"We're the merry rich merchants from old England.
Won't you please for to let us pass on?"

5. "Oh, no! Oh, no!" cries Andrew Bardeen.
"Oh, no; that can never be!
Your ship and your cargo we'll take all away
And your merry men drown in the sea!"

6. "Go build me a boat," cries Captain Charles Stuart;
"Go build it both safe and strong,
That I may go capture this king of the sea,
Or my life will not last me long."

7. He had not sailed more than a week in the year
When a ship he did espy,
Come sailing so far off and so far on
Till at last it came sailing so nigh.

8. "Who are you? Who are you?" cries Captain Charles Stuart.
"Who are you, and where are you bound?"
"We're the merry Scotch robbers from old Scotland.
Won't you please for to let us pass on?"

9. "Oh, no! Oh, no!" cries Captain Charles Stuart.
"Oh, no; that never can be!
Your ship and your cargo we'll take all away
And your merry men drown in the sea!"

10. "Come on! Come on!" cries Andrew Bardeen.
'Tis I that don't fear you a pin!
'Tis you that can show your bright brasses without,
But we'll show you bright steel within!"

11. 'Twas at that moment the battle began,
And loudly the cannon did roar.
They had not fought more than a last and a half
Till Captain Charles Stuart gave o'er.

12. "Go back! Go back!" cries Andrew Bardeen,
And tell King George Third for me
That he may be king of the whole wide land,
But I will be king of the sea!"

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, California. Do not send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

PURI-PURI, WHITE-MAN FASHION — *Merlin Moore Taylor*
A white officer meets the New Guinea natives' test.

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL — *John Webb*
"One-Two" Mac changes the color of a Haitian gold mine.

STANDISH OF THE STAR Y A Five-Part Story Part III — *Gordon Young*
The nesters find a champion among the cowmen.

ORDINARY MEN — *Royce Brier*
The American desert—beautiful and cruel.

A MAN'S LINE — *William Byron Mowery*
What's one man's easy duty is another's agony.

A MATTER OF TITLE — *George E. Holt*
A transaction in real estate and Moroccan politics.

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be *long stories* by W. C. Tuttle, Leonard H. Nason, Karl W. Detzer, Conroy Kroder, Hugh Pendexter, Arthur D. Howden Smith, W. Townend, Sydney Herschel Small, Frederick Moore, Barry Scobee, J. D. Newsom and Gordon Young, and short stories by Raymond S. Spears, Gordon MacCreagh, Bill Adams, George E. Holt, E. S. Pladwell and many others—tales of the war, the frontier, the West, the South, the sea, the Great Lakes, the Philippines, Japan, Bolivia, Morocco, New Guinea.

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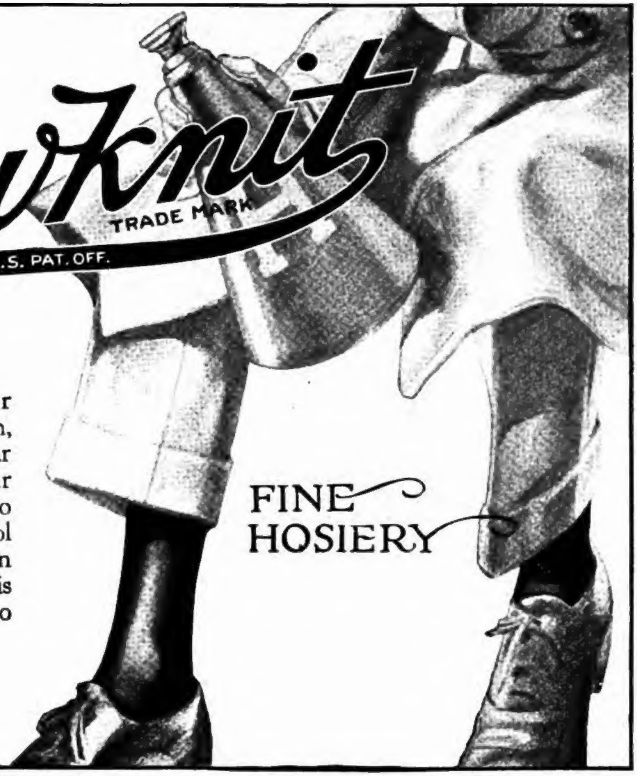

NOW comes the time for Shawknit 10s numbers: rich, heavy, lustrous silks, with extra wear and added warmth. Some men wear them the year around. Nor is it too early for the Shawknit silk and wool mixtures, of which there is an unusually attractive showing this fall. You may count on good wear to match the good looks.

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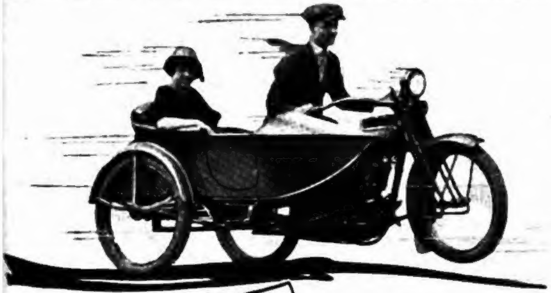

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EAGER get-away—the rushing acceleration of a zooming airplane—that's the 1924 Harley-Davidson, with its new aluminum-alloy pistons!

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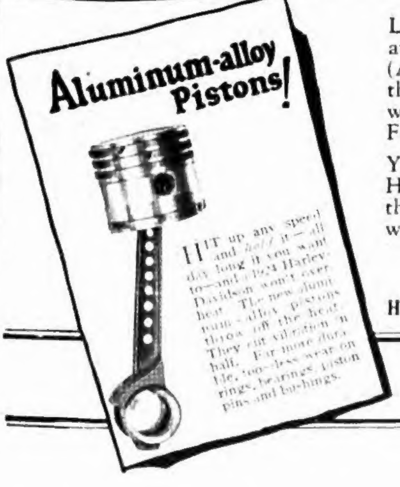
HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY, Dept. V, Milwaukee, Wisconsin



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Harley-Davidson
The Motorcycle

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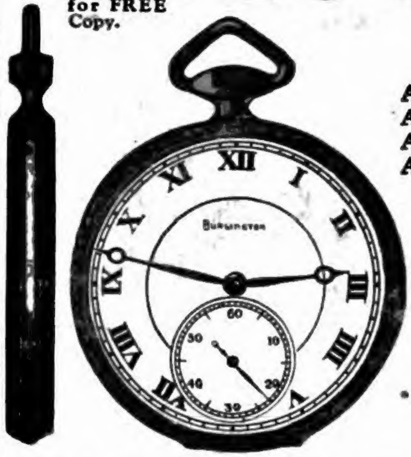

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3 Complete Novelettes

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